

Pathways

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CONTENTS

Quitting Too Soon.....	1
Frustration & Perseverance.....	2
Chance & Opportunity	3
Passion & Reason	4

*It is the emptiness
within the cup that
makes it useful*

Tao Te Ching

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Quitting Too Soon

In my university life and in my entrepreneurial life I often see people who quit too soon.

It seems to me that people quit things too soon for three main reasons:

1. They cannot see (or lose sight of) the potential benefits of staying the course and lose the desire to put in the effort.
2. Good enough is good enough. Some people quit after putting in some effort because the improvements that they see appear to be getting smaller and therefore not worth the sustained level of effort.
3. Others quit because they lack the belief in themselves. They simply lack the belief that they have the skills and abilities necessary to achieve the results they seek.

In almost all cases there are elements of lost hope and/or lost desire, as well as questions of perceived ability and/or perceived benefits.

Often we cover the quitting process with some justification and add statements like "It's just not worth the effort" or "My goals and/or interests changed" or "I have more important things I need to do."

What we're really saying here when we quit things, is that our decisions are often influenced by emotional content, and logic can sometimes take something of a back seat. Again, that's not to say emotions should not be a part of the decision tree, but they should not be allowed to rule when a decision is being made about whether to quit something.

The 80/20 rule suggests to us that we get the first 80% of the results from the initial investment of effort, but

that the last 20% of result takes inordinately more effort compared to the initial results. Sometimes we see this as 'not worth the effort' or we lose heart because we feel that we don't have the abilities.

I see this a lot in my science classes. Over the years I have run across students who can get the first 80% of the material pretty well, but then the whole 'science isn't my thing' response kicks in and some of the students who acquiesce to the thought that science is too hard for them will give in.

Likewise, in the martial arts, students make big technical improvements and fitness gains in the first few months of training and then the real work begins and they can lose heart.

Sometimes life can get in the way and cause us to make changes in our priorities that are dictated by circumstance, but I'm not talking about that sort of 'quitting.' I'm talking about the quitting that goes on when there are no compelling reasons for not investing the effort and achieving the result.

I guess what I am saying is that we can easily imagine our way into quitting when things get tough; it is much harder to see the imaginings for what they are and resolve to continue the path we started.

Don't get me wrong, there are times to walk away and make a new start, but there are also times to stay the course. The trick is to recognize each of these times for what it is and make the right choice at the right time for the right reasons....which is a good deal harder. ☺

Frustration and Perseverance

Do you ever get frustrated? Does frustration ever make you feel like giving up? O.K. so these are rhetorical questions, we've all known moments of frustration, whether it has been in our education, our jobs or our relationships. The issues are basically similar: We experience frustration, the frustrations loom larger and larger and eventually we feel like throwing up our hands and walking away.

I have been writing this newsletter every month for the last ten years. In the early years I would sit and stare at the screen waiting to write a newsletter because it had to be done. It got very frustrating.

Thankfully I learned to let it go and wait, be patient and allow the thing to evolve in its own time. Patience and perseverance pay off. It has been the same with my academic research and with running a business. I am also learning that there is no small element of this in preparing my son to assume his rightful place in the world of adults as a productive, caring, and compassionate human.

Learning martial arts, learning how to write, learning how to run a business and being a parent have all taught me that the more frustrated I become and the more I respond to that frustration the worse things become. Frustration leads me to a shorter temper, unwise decisions and more often than not, the path of regret.

If I recognize frustration for what it

is...an idea not yet fully formed and leave it alone, the right answer will come in its own time. Newsletters that are not ready to be written simply need to left to gestate. Martial techniques that have not yet become skills simply need to be worked on consistently and allowed to mature in their own time. Invariably, when I put something aside for a while and come back to it when the time is right, the results can be pretty darned good. The point here is not to force an answer until it is ready to emerge.

Of course, reality raises its head in terms of academic deadlines, financial balance statements, insistent children and other harbingers of approaching deadlines.

I remember as a kid having a chrysalis in a jar once. I was told that there was a butterfly inside it and that if I could wait the butterfly would hatch. As the days went by I could see the chrysalis twitching. Unlike my son, who was given the same opportunity at a similar age, I just had to open the jar and unwrap the chrysalis to see the butterfly. All I got was goop and no butterfly. My son watched, asked questions and was rewarded for his patience by three moths. We both learned valuable lessons.

The lesson is clear, when we force things to completion we often get a lesser result than if we let them grow in their own time. Despite the demands of our deadline-driven work lives, the lesson is not to be

lost. Some of my best science and my best academic writing has been done by having the idea and just letting it sit there, while I get on with other things. Eventually the idea comes back as a fully fledged product.

Perhaps it comes to this...we can feel so pushed to perform that we force our results. Sometimes it is better to breathe some waiting time into our growth and allow gestation to do its work.

There is another aspect to this article, which revolves around the notion that growth is rarely linear. Frequently we experience rapid growth followed by long periods of seeming plateau-like performance. I believe that this is exactly as things should be. Ideas are like triggers that can fire off a lot of short fuses all at the same time or, just as easily equally, a trigger can fire off a single fuse that erupts into a major explosion, much later. The trick is to recognize each trigger for its own merit.

Attempting to perform at the same level continuously creates a false expectation. It is better to recognize times of productivity as well as times of gestation and to use them to their fullest. In this way, both sorts of times will lead to improved productivity and performance as well as a greater sense of internal peace and a sense of moving with the flow of life, rather than forcing the flow of life.

☺

[P]eople are too bound up in themselves. If they weren't so self-obsessed they'd have no need to worry

Tao Te Ching

Chance and Opportunity

The world is rarely as we imagine it to be. When I first came to Mississippi, the last thing I wanted to do was stay here...but that was twenty some years ago.

Curious, that.

So where am I going with this article? Take what we said in the last two articles and look at them through the lens of living a life.

Our lives are a series of vignettes, short stories and movies that are filled with characters, plots and sets. We are the lead actor and the movie producer, and to some extent we are also the writer of the screenplay.

So, what do you think of the movie you are living so far? Is it what you would like as the main starring role for your career?

If you look at each of the vignettes as a short story, you can see why I started this article with moving to Mississippi. This was not something that I had ever intended to do, and yet from that massively improbable event have flowed some amazing opportunities, some truly wonderful people whom I have had the honor to call 'friend' and some learning experiences that I never thought that I needed.

I cannot say that the screenplay of my life has followed the script that I intended when I was twelve and first considered what I was going to do with my life, but then again,

what did the twelve-year-old know about the opportunities that might await him?

So it comes to perspective, I can choose to look at the screenplay of my life as a series of near disasters and unforeseen pitfalls followed by not-what-I-intended or I can look at it as a series of unforeseen left turns, each of which has led me down a new road filled with new possibilities and opportunities.

Then we can take it from the macrocosmic view of living a whole life, to the microcosmic view of living a single day. If I live with a philosophy that life is full of unforeseen pitfalls and is not going the way I wanted...how do you think I will be greeting and living each day?

Conversely, if life is in large part unpredictable and yet full of opportunity, how will that affect how I greet and live each day?

This is not to say it is easy. It isn't. Seeing opportunity is not always easy. To a young professor, who just took a job in Mississippi it seemed like the end of a lot of his dreams, to the older man, looking back on his career, the path may not have been what I would have chosen, but the experiences would not be changed for anything.

I learned early on that what I do is because I live to teach. How many times has my life here in Missis-

issippi reinforced that notion and underscored that ground truth to my life?

It's in everything I do...it's in my academic life, it's in my business, my martial arts, poetry and newsletter. The screenplay is about giving opportunity to others and helping them to become successful, helping them to see their potential and believing in the quality of the human spirit, both in individuals and as a species. Perhaps I am still an idealist, but I don't mind, it serves its purpose.

So here it is: Life is not always what we expect. It is massively unpredictable and yet it is full of opportunity.

How you view what happens, will, in large part, color how the screenplay gets written. I have been down both roads with respect to how to look at life, I can definitely recommend the path where see opportunity in what happens.

Remember, we do not reach success without falling over a few times. If you wish to be successful, embrace your failures, learn from falling over and get back up, and see opportunity for what it is.

☺

If you can put yourself aside, then you can do things for the whole of the world. And if you love the world, like this, then you are ready to serve it

Tao Te Ching

Passion and Reason

It is an interesting thing to be a human. We have two competing aspects of our being: On the one hand there is reason and on the other there is passion.

I sometimes think that passion gets a bad rap. We eschew emotion in favor of logic and live lives of careful consideration rather than emotional impulse. Indeed, we teach our children to show self-control and develop impulse control and to control their emotions. We generally consider that this is a good thing to do, but when life is not black and white, we need both passion and reason to work in concert as equal partners to chart a course through the decisions that we make in the process of daily living. You can pretend to do without one or the other, but ultimately you are denying a part of yourself.

Thoughts, emotions and words are such powerful things. Once formed, experienced or uttered (even in the quietest corners of our souls) they can never be undone. It is one of the great responsibilities that we hold as humans. We use passion and reason every moment of every day when we make decisions about how to build relationships or what to do with our lives.

Reason helps us to make sense out of world, to give it intellectual meaning, passion does the same thing at the emotional and visceral level. Together, reason and passion give our lives deeper meaning, color and vibrancy.

Let me see if I can provide an example that might help. In my lectures on campus, I can give a clear, well-reasoned discourse on the subject matter at hand and I can ensure that it is understood. But without passion it will not be felt, nor will it have impact or meaning in the lives of my students. I would argue that without passion in the classroom the mind never truly learns. Emotional connection in the learning process creates indelible

memory.

It is the passion that I feel in the classroom that brings my lecture to life and turns the classroom into a laboratory for the exploration of the human journey.

Passion takes the black and white facts of learning and turns them into the multitudinous shades of grey that constitute the process of living.

My passion, however, is not for my subject; it used to be. My passion is for the process of growth, the potential of excellence as a renewable resource. I don't do what I do in my business, in my academic world or in my writing because I am passionate about the material (although there is some truth in that); I do it because I am passionate about creating opportunities for success.

It is passion, not reason, that allows us strive, to fail, to fall over and to get back up again and do it again in search of success.

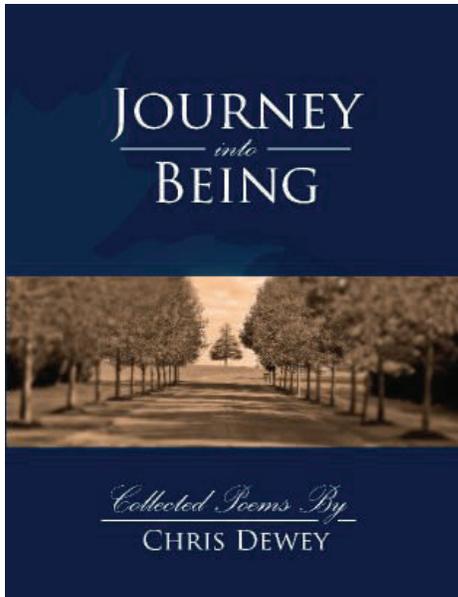
I was talking with one of my friends this afternoon about the meaning of passion and I made the comment that in this moment as we sit here and talk together we are experiencing the crowning moment of thirteen billion years worth of atomic interactions and evolutionary events. It is the inevitable consequence of billions of improbable events across the full range of space and time as we understand them...and if this doesn't cause us to consider living our lives with passion, then we are missing the point somewhere along the line. It was in some ways an exercise in rhetoric, but think about it for a moment: When you grasp, even for an instant, the sheer magnitude of this thing we call living, you cannot help but be awed by it.

In moments like these, reason may have laid out our understanding of the path, but it is passion that gives the path real meaning.

So...where is the passion in your life?☺

SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

- ◆ NICK LOWE, U.K. OLYMPIC JUDO COACH, PEACHTREE CITY, GA, AUGUST 11TH, 2007
- ◆ NICK LOWE, U.K. OLYMPIC JUDO COACH, SMAA, STARKVILLE MS, AUGUST 18TH, 2007
- ◆ SMAC TOURNAMENT, GREENWOOD, MS, AUGUST 18TH, 2007
- ◆ BULLDOG BASH DEMONSTRATION, DOWNTOWN STARKVILLE, MS, AUGUST XX, 2007
- ◆ LOUISIANA STATE JUDO CHAMPIONSHIPS, XXXX, LA, SEPTEMBER 22ND, 2007.
- ◆ T'AI CHI CHUH WEEKEND RETREAT, PLYMOUTH BLUFF, CO-LUMBUS, MS, OCTOBER 6 & 7TH, 2007.
- ◆ AKAYAMA JU JITSU, FALL CLINIC, SMAA, STARKVILLE, MS, OCTOBER 20TH, 2007
- ◆ MISSISSIPPI JUDO TOURNAMENT, JACKSON, MS, OCTOBER 27TH, 2007



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