

Pathways

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**"Move out of your comfort zone.
You can only
grow if you are willing to feel
awkward and
uncomfortable when you try
something new."**

[Brian Tracy](#)

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Players and Spectators

There are two groups of people according to some motivational speakers and life-skills coaches. There are the players and there are the spectators. Put another way around there are those who are actually in the arena getting sweaty and bloody and there are those in stands, watching the action.

We all like to think that we are the players and that it's everyone else who's in the stands watching the work getting done, but if for a moment we are honest, we know that we are more often spectators rather than players in our own lives.

Part of the reason for this is that we live like elastic bands. We live within our comfort zones and while we may drift up to the very edge of our comfort zones, we allow our habituated responses to keep us snugly placed inside our comfort parameters. And, we think, wisely so. It's scary out there. We dare not snap the elastic band.

If we dare to cross the threshold of our comfort zones, (either those that we have made for ourselves or those that we have allowed others to make for us), we meet with uncertainty, doubt, risk of failure, potential ridicule from the spectators, the risk of success and last but not least the undeniable fact that we don't know it all. (Yeah, I know, that was a ten line sentence and a one sentence paragraph and I know better...deal with it!)

O.K., so back to the point. For each of us to truly grow, we have to be willing to embrace risk and stretch ourselves into unknown territory. We knew this when we were babies, we somehow

forget it as we grow up.

One of the great pieces of advice for success-bound individuals is simply to take action. See where that action takes you and make another decision and take more action. Repeat as necessary until you reach your goal...which presupposes something: The existence of a goal.

Our goals come from our visions and our visions come from our dreams. We see what is possible in the mind's eye and we either accept it as a possibility or we cast it aside as a flight of fancy. If, for one scary minute, we accept that it is possible to actually achieve our dreams, then the world turns and a vision emerges. That vision cares not one whit about your comfort zone, because, truth be told, if you trust your vision, it will draw out of you every ounce of potential that you can muster and it will never be satisfied with excuses.

You can sit in an armchair within your comfort zone without a vision for your entire life if you wish or you can take action. It is entirely your choice. It is not for you to complain, or for others to judge you; whichever decision you make. We have a life to live to its fullest, however you imagine that to be.

I have been a competitive martial artist for more than thirty years and if I learned anything from that experience, it is that if you want to earn the right to wear the laurels, you have to step into the arena. You have to take action. You have to take a risk.

I also know that I have been a spectator in my own life too many times when I was afraid to step outside of my comfort zone. How about you? ☯

Exploring and explaining

I got into a conversation the other day about what it is to be human. Well actually, we were talking about why humans do the things they do. I believe that humans do two things from the minute they are born: They seek to understand and they seek to discriminate. Let's chew it finer.

The seeking to understand part is relatively simple. Babies set about exploring their world with an intuitive hunger that is almost staggering. Think about what babies learn in their first two years on the planet, compared to what you (or I) learned in the last two years. It kind of puts things into perspective, doesn't it? Man seeks understanding about everything. Some people ask deeper questions about life than others, but that's not the point, all the time, everywhere we are asking questions about the meaning of stuff...Does he/she like me? Why is gas so expensive? Why is the sky blue? ...you know, the basic things of life!

The desire to venture into the unknown has led to all of the great discoveries and was certainly the motivation of the world's pioneers and explorers. The desire to know is called the Cognitive Imperative and whether we realize it or not, we use it every day in ways large and small. Next, comes our penchant for discrimination and labeling absolutely everything we can touch, taste, smell, see, hear, or intuit. In its simplest form, the art of discrimination and labeling goes back to the most primitive tool of survival: That's

lunch versus I'm lunch...or Threat versus non-threat. The desire to sort and label is called the Binary Operative and it too is operational in ways large and small all the time.

So what?

In large part, this newsletter is about our sense of personal purpose, our goals and our visions. At its absolute simplest, a vision and its pendant goals come from the desire to know. All you need to do is ask one simple question of the unknown: "I wonder if?" The instant you ask that question and turn it into a desire it becomes possible for you to change your world. The amount of change relates to the size of the vision, which goes back to the nature of the original question that you asked.

If the vision takes root in your mind and heart, it will drive you with a force that will not be stopped. If you develop a vision of something that does not exist in the physical world (hence the word... 'vision') and desire to see the outcome, then immediately your conscious and subconscious minds start to work on bringing the vision into reality.

So what am I saying? We ask questions all the time. Not all of them need to be answered or even get answered. The main difference between those people who set goals and follow through on them is the motivation to see things through. Look at the quote box at the bottom of the page...that's simple enough.

So let's take a concrete example to

drive the point home.

Let's say I am unfit and perhaps overweight. I can envision an image of a slimmer, trimmer, fitter me, but if I don't change my habits, overcome my lack of activity or overeating, then nothing will change. I am comfortable where I am and cannot overcome the inertia of my habits.

If the image is powerful enough for me and there is a sufficiently powerful motivational force behind it (my doctor told me that my lifestyle is putting me at risk), then we will be pushed out of our comfort zones and take action. The cognitive imperative is at work asking us if we could create a healthier lifestyle. The binary operative is at work giving us an image of healthy versus not healthy.

The thing is though, we have become incredibly good at doing the wrong things and they feel natural. Doing something different (getting exercise, changing our eating or working-sleeping habits) feels *unnatural*. So, at the first challenge we fall back into our comfort zones and settle for the fact that "at least I tried."

Explorers are never content with the *status quo*. Explorers take risks, overcome their inertia and do stuff!

Failure is not an option...sooner or later, if we take the right actions, (not necessarily the comfortable ones), success happens.

So...what burning questions do you have for your life? ☺

Life leaps like a geyser for those who can drill through the rock of inertia

Alexis Carrel

The Ju Jitsu Approach

There are a lot of things to be said about how we train in the martial arts. In this article I want to investigate some of the things we talk about in the self defense and Ju Jitsu classes, but rarely elaborate upon.

1. Train as though your life depended upon it. That is to say, train with intent. Train with meaning. No action should be an empty gesture. Each action should be precise, accurate and meaningful, no energy should be wasted. Only in this way will your actions take root and offer the real lessons that they have to teach you.

2. Learn the technique, but once you have truly, deeply learned it there is a second part: Test, refine and temper the technique until it is a skill forged in the fires of real practice. Understand that each technique is governed by a set of inviolate principles, but that also, the technique contains enough flexibility that you can make it fit your own body and the situation in which it will be used.

3. Practice as close to reality as you can. Seek opportunities to train in kumite (free sparring) and randori (free practice), not to see if you can beat your opponent, but rather to see if you are turning techniques into viable skills.

4. Study the human body, learn how it moves, how it uses energy, where are its vital points, where are the energy meridians, what do they mean.

Understand how to be elegant and efficient, graceful under stress, economic in your actions.

5. Study kata (form) with total commitment. In the kata are the principles of the arts you practice. Put kime (intent) into your kata so that it will teach you mushin (mind of no mind). Practiced with diligence and commitment, passion and belief, kata will teach you to move without thought. You may not notice the results of committed practice in yourself, but I guarantee you that you will notice it in someone else. When a person has truly learned the lessons that kata has to teach there is an added dimension to performance that is hard to define. Some will call it elegance, grace or art, some will call it effortless movement, some will call it meditative movement, some will call it mastery....it really doesn't matter what label you put on it, the result is clear to any observer....there are those who truly train and those dabble at the edges. The fruits of kata practice are obvious.

So these then are five principles that should govern your training: practice with intent, study technique, practice in real situations, understand the body and practice form.

The techniques of the martial arts are pure and have been used for generations. Each technique comes from the simple truth that there are only

three things that you can do with a human body: push, pull and twist. Once you have grasped this fundamental truth, learning becomes easier. Equally, once we quit fighting ourselves and learn to relax within the training, learning becomes easier. The fact of the matter is very simple: The body, mind and spirit work together as a unit. When they are in harmony, learning and movement is easy. When disharmony exists, movement is choppy and unbalanced, the body is stiff and the mind is rigid. When you train in the martial arts you are training to face yourself with honesty.

Having said all of this then, the martial arts are nothing more than a crucible of learning and a vehicle for personal growth. Martial arts teach us who we are and what potential lies hidden within us. If we are open to the process, martial training will pull us out of our comfort zones, shed light upon those parts of ourselves that we could not see, and also shed light upon those parts of ourselves that we would just as soon pretend do not exist.

The answer? Practice, practice and practice. When you think you've got it, go back and start again. Practice, practice and practice. There is no mastery, there is only a willingness to begin anew with an open mind in each practice session. There is always more to learn. ☺

Once you discover that you have only been living half a life; the other half will haunt you until you develop it.

Phillip Brooks

Desire and Belief

In a lot of ways, this newsletter is all about Desire and Belief.

If you want to achieve anything in life, you first must desire to reach the goal, second believe that you can reach it, thirdly have confidence that you have the ability to reach those things about which you can dream and fourthly, you must trust in the process.

Visions are large, expansive things that draw us out of our comfort zones. When we engage in the vision process, we have no idea how to make the vision a reality, and that doesn't matter. What matters is that you believe it to be possible, despite your inability to see the mechanism. When I dreamed of becoming a university professor, or opening a business, I had not the slightest clue how to achieve either of these goals, yet achieve them I did. I had the desire, and I believed that it was possible...beyond that I was (and still am) clueless.

It's not enough to have the vision though, you have to want it. I mean WANT it, viscerally. Like, life-would-not-be-complete-if-you-don't-achieve-it sort of want. This sort of desire is the desire that will allow you to make any sacrifice, accept any challenge and overcome any obstacle, rather than risk losing the prize of seeing your vision come to fruition. We might argue that if you don't feel this in your gut, then you really don't have a vision, you have a want, which is an entirely different thing.

Visions see the light of day when we take action and take steps towards fulfilling lesser goals on the road to the vision. Along the way though, there will be setbacks, obstacles, doubt, ridicule, fear. What makes each of these things smaller in the mind is the sense of purpose brought

out by a personal belief in the outcome. You know you have the ability to see it through. Even when you are afraid and have doubt gnawing at you, there is still that quiet, almost silent assurance that you believe in the vision...it is after all your vision. As I said earlier, we set out with not a clue how to get to the end of the journey. We hold true to the vision, we believe in ourselves and yet we must also have confidence in our ability and have confidence that the way ahead will be made clear to us as we move along. Synergy and synchronicity are not to be underestimated here. Goethe was correct, all manner of things happen that we could not predict, once we commit to a specific purpose.

All of which, of course, brings us to trust.

I think that for every person I have ever met who has had a vision and held to that vision, there has been a process. As we said earlier, when we get started we have no idea how the vision will come about, but we have the courage to set out anyway. As we move along and survive our challenges and upsets, face our fears, ignore the ridicule of others, extinguish our doubts and overcome our obstacles, we learn to trust.

Even though we are blind, we trust. Sometimes I'm not sure what it is that we do trust. For some it is self, for some it is God (however you define the term), for some it is simply the unfolding process of the universe, for some it might even be a karmic unfolding....the essential point is that for each of to achieve our vision we must come to a position of trust...sooner or later.

Another thing about visions, while we're about them. There's no point trying to explain your vision to anyone else, because, well, it's not their

SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

- ◆ **BULLDOG BASH, STARKVILLE, MS SEPTEMBER 12TH 2008.**

vision. Even your strongest supporter, staunchest ally or most loyal friend will not fully understand the nuances of your vision...so, let it go. It is enough that you have a vision and the courage to take the first step.

As for the rest, it will all become clear over time. Yes, visions are big, expansive things that will destroy our comfort zones, but they are also silent engineers of the future. Working quietly in the background of your mind, your vision, once rooted, will change you.

So what does this have to do with martial arts you might ask? Good question.

For me martial arts was one of my visions. I saw what was possible in the books and in my instructors. The puny, bullied twelve-year-old had a vision of a person moving with grace and elegance, power and purpose. He saw himself in balance and set out on a journey. Who knows where it will yet lead. There is so much that I have yet to learn. My vision hasn't been fully realized yet. Catch me in an honest moment and I will tell you that I have barely scratched the surface of what there is to learn and to share. ☺

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old routine?
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