

# Pathways

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*"I challenge you to make your life a masterpiece"*

**Tony Robbins**

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## PSI

You might ask why I would write an article about Pounds per Square Inch...and you would be justified in doing so. So, instead I decided to write an article about your Personal Skills Inventory.

Every semester, in either my Research Methods class or my Professional Writing class I ask my students to produce a professional resume and a self-portrait in words. The goal is to enable a delineation of personal talents, abilities, passions and desires.

So what does this have to do with a personal skills inventory? That's a pretty easy question. Like any financial balance sheet on which you can list your assets and your liabilities...what you own and what you owe; a PSI is your life's balance sheet. Do you know your assets?

Let's ask some questions to get you started:

What do you want to do in life? What do you need to know to do it? What do you have to bring to the task of getting there?

When you develop a Personal Skills Inventory, you need to develop a list for four areas of interest: What talents do you have? What are you able to do? What are your desires? What things are you passionate about?

Now make a list for each of these questions and please, do them in that order. Allow your mind to fully embrace each question. Take the question "What are you able to do?" I'll bet you could go on for a long time with this one. For instance: I can sew, I can cook, I can do basic electrical work...the list is very extensive and it should be.

Take the time, it will be worth it.  
Don't come back till you've done it.  
You came back didn't you?

Did you do it?

What did you discover?

O.K....I'll trust that you have done the task and it is now a different day.

Now let's deconstruct the process.

I'll suspect that your list of talents is waaay shorter than your ability list.

Notice also that the things that you are able to do, includes things that you

have learned to do and things for which you have no real talent. The list

also includes things that you do not really want to do and things that you

would just as soon leave to someone else. Now look at your desire and passion lists.

The desire list is probably waaay longer than your passion list.

There are things that I desire, but there are some things about which I am truly passionate.

Our passions are the things that drive us

Once you know these things, you also have some tools with which you can

examine your supposed areas of weaknesses. Your weaknesses get a bad rap.

Weaknesses are areas of potential blindness or potential growth areas. Look at them for what they are.

When you are done you will have come up with a personal balance sheet

of sorts: You know your strengths (assets) and your weaknesses (liabilities).

You also have some idea about what things drive you, and,

what is perhaps more important, you have them in black and white...right in front of your face.

Now ask yourself a final question: How honest were you? ☺

## Talent and Tenacity

As we near the end the semester, it is time for another round of rank promotions at the business, and in the last week or so, we have been awarding some well-deserved green belts.

In our system, green belt is a threshold rank...it's right in the middle of the rank path to Black belt. Green belt marks the end of the beginning and the beginning of the advanced training that gets you ready for Black belt.

Although there are technical requirements at each rank, there are some things that my instructors and I look for when we make promotion decisions. At green belt we are looking for dedication that overcomes the inevitable frustrations that have crept into a person's training. Also, and almost just as inevitably, many of our students will state that they do not feel ready for green belt when it arrives. Some will say that they do not feel talented enough, or capable enough, or coordinated enough.. This is as it should be.

Green belt is a threshold, not an arrival point. It is a way station along the road of self-discovery. It is a moment for reflection, evaluation and recommitment. All of which means it is a time for some self-examination. What things do you do well? What things need work? Are you ready to step up to a more demanding level of technical performance? What are your goals in our program? What are your goals in the martial arts? How do the martial arts fit into your larger life outside the dojo?

As I said, more often than not, my students will tell me that they do not feel talented enough or capable enough for green belt, which is the part of the process that I want to discuss. We will have another article about the whole competency issue, but right now, I want to discuss the talent issue.

Make no mistake, talent is useful, but

does not ensure success. Over the years, both at the university and the business, I have known any number of talented souls who failed because talent was simply not enough.

You see it's not talent that gets you across the finish line. Talent may get you in the game, but talent on its own is simply not enough.

On the other side of the issue I have seen plenty of 'seemingly' untalented people achieve amazing success because they have other skills that make up for talent.

As we will discover in the next article, and as many of you may already know, I do not consider myself to have much in the way of talent in anything. What I do have are organizational skills and tenacity. Some people equate that to OCD and stubbornness. Whatever.

What it means in the real world is that I can take average ability and leverage it using my other skills and create a successful outcome in a desired endeavor.

My parents will tell you that I was a clumsy, awkward child with no physical or dexterity skills. And yet, after forty years of training there are moments in the martial arts in which I can be truly elegant. There are brief moments of grace and flow. It is not talent that led me to these moments; it was desire and tenacity. It was passion and vision that has kept me going. It was hope for tomorrow and faith in the process. When I flow it is due to love of what I do...be it teaching, geology, martial arts, poetry or photography.

Please do not misunderstand me, I am not trying to knock talented people, I have worked with, and trained, some incredibly talented people who have done some great things with their skill sets; I am simply not one of those souls.

So let's come back to the green belt who says that s/he is not talented

enough. Does it really matter? If you have the desire to keep training, to put in the work, to work through the frustrations and to keep your goals firmly in mind, then talent is a tool, just like any other.

Which brings me to my second point. Talent is something that we often measure against the skills of others. My friend Elaine is, to me, a gifted musician; her mind and heart work in ways that I can only imagine. She has told me that she has students who are more gifted. So what does that imply? Talent is a sliding scale based upon personal perception.

We all seem capable of recognizing talent when we see it in others, and we seem capable of measuring our own talents against those of other people, but how real are those judgments? How often do we misjudge ourselves? (See the next article).

Let's stay with the balance between talent and tenacity. Let's think about the slow development of skill and elegance through effort. For some, the path may seem easy because they have an innate ability. For others, the path may be harder because they do not have the natural ability. After sufficient training and work the skill levels may be indistinguishable to an observer. The 'gifted' person may still perform with ease and facility, and the 'ungifted' person may still have to work at the skill, but if the performance outcomes are the same, does it really matter how the performer got there?

It seems to me that if the performer keeps on working on their art be it quantum mechanics or origami, talent will only get you part of the way. Sometime or later the extra mile will demand tenacity, and this is where the pack starts to separate out and those who truly wish to excel in any field of performance will emerge.

To my mind, everything else is rhetoric. ☺

## The Dunning-Kruger Effect

One of the neat things about having some of the friends I have the honor to know, is that they are apt to tickle my mental activities with a well-placed observation or statement.

Recently, one of my friends made me aware of something I had known for a long time, but which I had never really thought about...The Dunning-Kruger Effect.

The what?

It's really a very simple observation that received its name from the academic work published in Psychology journals by the researchers who first quantified the effect. In essence, the D-K Effect is that people will tend to misjudge their own levels of competence with respect to other people in a particular area of personal performance and unfortunately make errors in judgment on the basis of their own estimations of true ability.

What it boils down to, is that unskilled people will tend to overrate their ability in any field, whereas the truly competent will tend to underrate their own abilities. As a direct consequence, truly competent individuals will undermine their own self-confidence and self-worth by assuming that others are equally (or more) capable. The unskilled person will, on the other hand, over-inflate his/her sense of self, by assuming that other people are less competent.

The error of judgment in each case comes from an assumption that we are either better or worse than our fellows. The incompetent will assume that *self* is of greater ability, whereas the competent will judge that *others* are of greater ability.

I can see this effect play itself out in my life so easily. I know there have been times in the past when I believed I was good at something, only to discover that I didn't know half of what I thought I did. Herein lie the seeds of humility and the roots of true learning for any honest soul.

At the other end of the scale, I have been training and working in martial arts, geology, poetry and photography for several decades and I will be the first to tell you that I don't know anything, or that my work is not as good as other people's.

I have said often in this newsletter that the more I learn about the martial arts, the less I know and the more I become aware of just how little it is that I do know. I do not see myself as talented, graceful, skillful, artistic or capable....and this is not just a misplaced sense of false humility...it is a deep-seated, visceral sense of self.

I look at the accomplishments of those whom I admire and see that the road in front of me is at least as long as the road I have thusfar traveled. In my own view of my life...I am not as good at what I do, as they are at doing the same things.

I know logically that I am not incompetent at what I do, but equally I do not see myself as in any way more accomplished than others....in fact, I see myself as stunningly average, for in truth, that's what I am.

Now, if I am honest, there is a problem with this view of life.

Because I see others as more capable, talented or deserving, in the world of self-promotion and marketing I truly suck. I wonder how many opportunities I have let go because I do not believe that I am capable at some level. How much do I let slide because I do not believe in my abilities...my own lack of self-worth?

This is not to say that we should turn in to shameless grandstanders, but we should believe in ourselves and our abilities and accomplishments.

Being true to yourself involves an accurate appraisal of your abilities.

Leaving aside the obvious for a moment, the error of reason at the root of the D-K Effect is in the nature of the comparisons being made. In the D-K Effect, we judge ourselves with respect to others, not to ourselves and the distance traveled in any journey of personal effort. The logical fallacy is that any standard of comparison in which people are compared to one another, rather than an empirical measure of personal development misses the true marks of accomplishment. We do not all start out with the same sets of talents, abilities and drives, so to compare myself to someone else with a different set of talents, abilities and drives is making a false comparison.

Apples and oranges anyone?

All of which brings me to the second string to this article:

The Imposter Syndrome. It turns out that there is a corollary to the D-K Effect in which talented, accomplished, capable and skilled people will fail to internalize the proof of their abilities. The result is that they will internalize the notion that they are undeserving of success and are in some way imposters or frauds, just waiting to be discovered and exposed. For people like this, success can easily be waived away as being a product of luck, or timing, but in no way would the success be attributed to personal ability.

Under this set of circumstances it is easy to magnify any perceived failing or weakness and to shrug off or disavow any success or accomplishment.

Experience suggests to me that people who feel this way may be apt to sabotage their own success just to prove to themselves that they are, in fact, a fraud.

Quietly, people who feel this way are secretly envious (in an admiring way) of those other souls who shine in success.

Now, take these two ideas and put them together and you have a recipe for an undervalued life and, I suspect, if taken to the extreme can be a recipe for personal disaster.

I should have seen and learned this earlier, but have failed to do so.

I watch my students learn and grow and achieve success either as martial artists or as scholars, business owners, parents....the list goes on. I am unwilling to see these things in myself. I will tell you it is a way of keeping me humble, but that is only a quasi-truth.

There is real value in learning this lesson and learning it early in life, especially if you wish to enjoy success for what it is and allow yourself the freedom to enjoy your abilities, talents and successes.

How are you doing? Hopefully you are doing better than me...(Dang it! Did it again!) ☹

## Competence

If we look at this newsletter as a gestalt, it all comes down to an honest appraisal of our abilities, talents, passions and desires.

The point to this exercise is that there are many things that we are capable of doing in life, but fewer things for which we are truly passionate. There are some things at which we are truly talented, and others at which we have to work. Those things at which we are talented do not necessarily correlate with those things about which we are passionate.

In order to achieve success in our endeavors we need to take these things and align them with a clear sense of who we are and what we want in life. In order to gain clarity we must be honest with ourselves. At some point we must come to terms with the D-K Effect and the Imposter Syndrome. We must know who we are.

Sometimes knowing self is not always welcome news. Sometimes knowing self creates a personal accountability. Perhaps I have to accept that I do have true ability in some area of life that previously I refused to accept.

Also, I have to let some things go,

in order to embrace others.

I might wish I was a concert pianist, but I'm also fifty years old and cannot play the piano...so much for that. It will be a point of sadness in my heart. I'll never know if I had any talent as a pianist or not. I never had the opportunity to find out and if I am honest, I didn't have enough passion to find out...apparently it was not that important to me. I am content enough to be moved by classical musical performance. In this area of life, I am a spectator.

So when this is all over and done I am further along in my understanding of who I am and what I do in life than I was at the beginning of the newsletter.

It also means that I can now recognize that there are lots of things that I could do in life, but there are some things that will bring me a deep sense of fulfillment. If I fail to embrace those things I will always feel slightly out of synch.

If we are honest, we all know this, but really don't appreciate being told, or asked to look...it's not a very friendly insight...unless of course you are completely in synch.

## SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

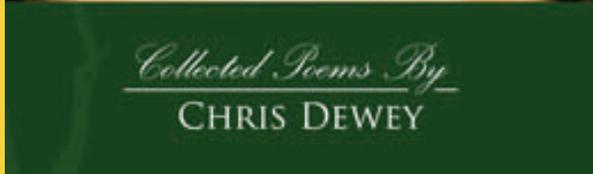
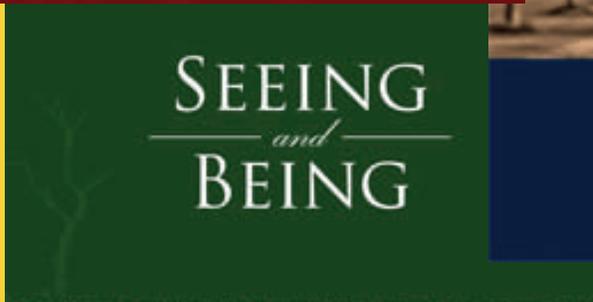
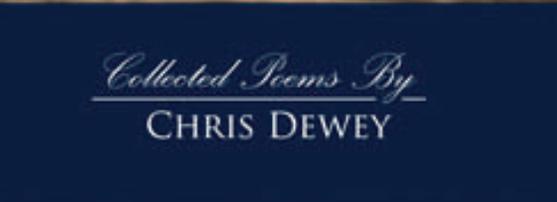
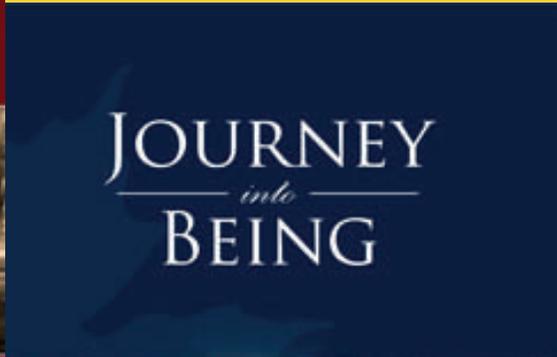
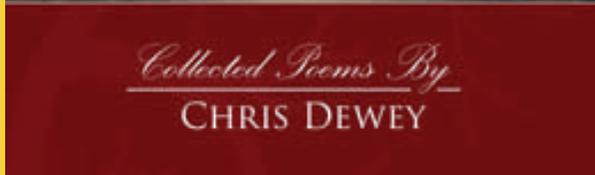
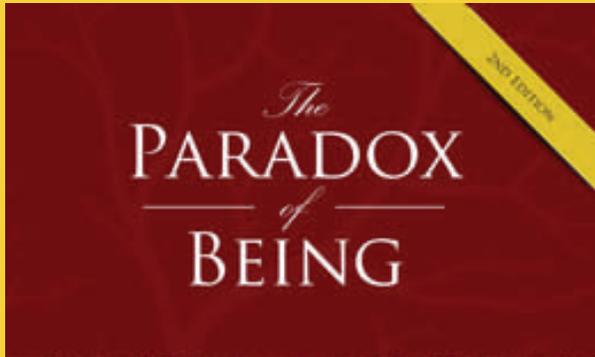
- ◆ **AKAYAMA WINTER CAMP. ORANGE BEACH, AL. MLK WEEKEND, JANUARY, 2010.**

Life is a journey of discovery. Martial arts are a microcosm of that journey. The lessons of the dojo are fractals of larger life and each step in our personal journey calls us to ask ourselves what we are doing and why we are doing it.

Finally, I want to say thank you. Thank you to Eric, Elaine, Ann, Anna, Jennifer, Jennifer, Cheryl, James, Chris, David, Lynn, Kevin Joseph, and Jessica in no particular order for being a feather to my cerebral cortex...individually and collectively in the last two weeks. I owe you each more than you may know and not what you each might think...

**Unselfish and noble actions are the most radiant pages  
in the biography of souls**

**David Thomas**



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