

Pathways

A MONTHLY NEWSLETTER PRODUCED BY CHRIS DEWEY MARTIAL ARTS, INC.

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"Work always as if you were a master. Expect from yourself a masterpiece."

Robert Henri,
The Art Spirit

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Technique

For the last couple of months I have been talking about what it means to be a Black Belt and what it means to take training seriously. In one of the articles I said that I look for heart in a Black Belt candidate. I also said that technical prowess was not on my list. There was a reason for that.

Over the years, I have seen altogether too many Black Belts who were superior technicians but who had not the slightest idea what it meant to be a Black Belt. I have seen stellar athletes on the national scene show so little regard for their opponents, the officials and the coaches, that I was truly disgusted by their attitude. Additionally, I have also seen black belt candidates who have lacked kinesthetic awareness or limited physical ability turn into some wonderfully proficient and admired Black Belts. I have watched amputees step or even hop up to the tournament line and pour their hearts into the battle of the moment and inspire the entire attending population.

Technique is only a very small part of being a black belt.

Every one of us, as we get older must recognize that all things fade; strength, endurance, flexibility and ultimately technique, will all fade, no matter how long we forestall the process. Sooner or later every one of us will go down to dust a little at a time. On the other hand, that does not mean that I should give up on refining my skills or maintaining high levels of physical fitness and health for as long as possible. If Joon Rhee at 70 years old can do 100 push-ups in a minute...what's my excuse? I have

none.

Show me a student with heart and you will also be seeing a student with commitment, dedication and desire. Students with heart truly want to learn, they thirst for knowledge. Students with heart want to improve, they want to achieve their potential and they are doers, first and foremost. Students with heart never quit and invariably go the extra mile. Consequently, students with heart often end up being technically proficient as well.

I *expect* technical skill at Black Belt, but it is not the only thing that I am looking for. Technical ability is the ultimate fruit that hangs on the tree of effort. Technical ability will inevitably develop over time in a student with heart by virtue of the fact that students with heart commit to their training.

Give me heart and everything else is possible. If there is no heart, there is nothing with which to work. Technical skill taken on its own merit has little value if it is not backed by the qualities of a committed martial artist. Conversely, you cannot over-value heart.

Heart creates self-belief and determination. From these things come the quest to improve self and the desire to learn the unknown. It has been true throughout history, all the great leaders, explorers, inventors and artists had heart....if they did not they would have crumbled at the obstacles that they faced in reaching their goals. Where are you in this process? Do you have the heart to be a master of your art? ☺

Technical Skill

O.K., so what am I talking about when I talk about technique?

Geoff Gleeson, the renowned, British Judo coach defines technique and skill as two different things. Techniques are things we learn, they are perhaps pieces of a puzzle or tactical tools. Skills, on the other hand, represent the strategic ability to use technique in a seamless, efficient and effortless fashion. Skill is the outcome of untold numbers of repetition that the student has completed. A skill is therefore a testament to quality of the learning experience, and a technique is a tool of the teaching environment. We practice techniques repeatedly, until they become useful, at which time they can be called skills. Each time we repeat a technique we make small adjustments as we evaluate our ability to produce the desired outcome. By constantly monitoring practice performance, improving the quality of our repetitions and performing the technique in the setting in which it will be required, the technique evolves into a skill.

Mastery in any field of endeavor comes from only one place: Repetition. As I have said countless times in class: Repetition is the mother of skill. Great instructors do not necessarily have very flamboyant techniques, but they do perform the basics with a mastery that frequently astounds the observer. A skill therefore is the external demonstration of an internalized technique. In terms of body movements, techniques tend to be choppy whereas skills are executed with grace and efficiency of movement

Mastery of skill comes from use in the arena for which the skill was intended. Skillful competitors frequently have a favorite action that is often seen as a personal trademark or a calling card. Skillful

competitors have refined their actions in the tournament arena so much so that people of lesser experience cannot defend themselves against the skill.

We can all aspire to be great technicians given the time, desire, repetition and sweat. Eventually, some of us might even become skillful. I believe, however, that there is another level, which is attainable. This is the level of mindless ability. At the level of mindless ability, there is simply the art itself and no practitioner. In these very, very rare circumstances you meet a student who has practiced for so many years that the movement of energy, which defines the execution of a skill is so efficient that you do not see the person performing.

Now, here is a goal worthy of attainment.

So what is the training requirement for such levels of mastery? Uncompromising dedication to training, every moment that you train...for decades!

Setting this level of attainment as your goal will keep you forever on the path to mastery. Good enough will never be so and excellence is always a beginning point. Setting this level of ability will keep you humble, it will keep you training in the times of doubt and through the plateaus of frustration. Setting this level of skill as your goal will keep you going to clinics and tournaments, it will help you keep an open mind and an empty cup. Every time you step on the deck you will know that you are still a beginner, still learning, still climbing the mountain.

Occasionally, you stop to look back at the view, but then you look ahead at the summit and realize there is still much climbing to do. I often wonder what that view will look like, and I often wonder whether I shall see the view, but in the greater

schemes of things it is not the view from the top that is of value, it's the journey itself. Each view along the way acquires the value of the sweat expended to get there.

So here it is again...Black belt is a starting point, not an ending point. Technical ability is a commodity that can always be refined, it is not a fixed quality. Technical mastery knows only one teacher... experience. Everything else is rhetoric.

The only place to build skills from techniques is on the deck, training. There are no short cuts, no substitutes and no stopping.

One of the greatest things that I have learned from the martial arts is that the well of knowledge is infinitely deep and that no matter what I learn, it is miniscule in comparison to what I have yet to learn. There is also another side to this discussion: While we turn techniques into skills, the training is refining our characters. We learn to be determined, not stubborn, we learn to get up one more time than we are knocked over, we learn to study, to listen, to pay attention to the details and finally we learn that quitting is simply not an option.

The truly neat thing about this, is that the trickle down effects spill themselves over into all areas of life. They are especially effective in our attitudes to school work and in our careers.

Building skill in any arena of activity is a hard task. Training is an uncompromising task master...but I think that we all know this in our hearts, which is why, so often we settle for "good enough" when excellence is just out of our immediate reach. Now there's a wake up call for you...and for me too! ☺

Inside the heart of every high achiever
is a better person attempting to get out

Anonymous

Open or closed

I like to think of myself as an open minded sort of person....which of course means that I am more closed minded than I care to admit.

In reality, all of us are prejudiced in some area of our thought process. Let me see if I can elaborate. Almost all of us take a position on certain things, the net result of which creates two camps: Those who agree with our position and everyone else. An open minded person can see both sides of an issue and might even be able to see additional positions other than those taking the either/or mindset. The trick to doing this is to suspend judgment. The instant we invoke a judgment, we create an "us and them, right and wrong" scenario. Sometimes this is a necessary place to go, often it is not. Frequently, when I get into trouble in my relationships, it is because I have failed to see all sides of a situation or retain an open, non-judging mind. I am simply not that wise.

I have heard it said that wisdom comes from suffering, which, if it is true might suggest that given the conflict that I have managed to cause in my life over the years, I'd be surrounded by some very wise people!!

On the plus (and less whimsical) side, however...One of the things that I have learned from running a business, is to listen to people around me and (when I am working well) sense to the flow of energy within the system. Sometimes I will sense a change in the energy of the business and attribute it to a certain event or course of action. Sometimes I am correct, at other times, however, people within my business (or outside of it, for that matter) have information that I have missed. If I am not open minded enough to listen, when I lack the insights of wisdom, I make poor business decisions.

The same could be said for most of us, for our families, our relationships and our careers.

During the move to our new dojo, one of my project managers asked me if I was the sort of person who couldn't see the forest for the trees or couldn't see the trees for the forest. In a typically predictable fashion, I said "Yes, depending upon circumstance."

Sometimes I can see the whole picture like a sweeping strategist and miss the single tree upon which all my strategic plans hinge. At other times I am blind to the great plan and get enmeshed in the minutiae. I attempt to maintain a sort of dynamic balance between these two extremes. The net result of this balancing act is that as a manager I can get in there and do the simplest of tasks, and at the same time I can let my people learn from their own mistakes. Moreover, as a strategist for my business, I have to maintain a vision of where we are going. It is a fine juggling act. It is an act in which I drop the balls fairly regularly and learn from the experience of doing so.

So where are we going with this? Really, I am attempting to get you to think about where you are blind. We are all blind somehow, somewhere. As the wonderful line goes "You don't know, what you don't know you don't know." How could you? It is a round about way of saying that we all are blind in some part and to take an entrenched position on an issue without first being in possession of all the facts is to invite disaster. So often, when I get in an argument with someone, I ask myself "What am I missing? What have I failed to see? What does this person see that I do not?" It doesn't always help, but it does leave me able to see an opinion other than my own and even if I do not accept the opinion, I can at least respect it and give it honor.

So it comes to this: Tolerance and understanding. We all see what we see, nothing more. We all color what we see according to the nature of our life experiences and our current perspective on life. I may see things one way at one stage of my life and have a completely different opinion at a later stage in my life. So why should I not accord other people with similar attributes? Other people are interpreting the world through their own perceptive lenses, they do not have the benefit of my perspective, nor I theirs.

Consequently in any communication there are at least six participants:

You

Me

My view of you

Your view of you

Your view of me

My view of me....

Worrying isn't it? Very rarely are all six people resolvable into just two people... you and me. There is always what I think I am saying versus what you think you are hearing. There is my perspective on an event and then there is yours. When we think that we are right, invariably we are not.

Once we believe that we are right our ability to see clearly becomes compromised. We can easily become entrenched. It is the nature of the structure that when we get entrenched we are unable to see the landscape around us. I am reminded of the saying that a trench is just a grave with the ends kicked out. What an interesting comment.

Think about the horrors of trench warfare. Now apply the image to entrenched positions during a negotiation. Do you see any winners in this scenario?

In order to be successful in open communications, at some point we have take the risk of entering no man's land and lay our weapons and protection aside. It is a difficult thing to do. It makes us vulnerable. Maybe it even makes some of us feel weak.

So this of course brings us back to Judo. Weakness is not always what it seems to be. In Judo we place our selves in what I call a "balance crisis" in order to create an opportunity. Each time we make an attack in judo, we place ourselves in a vulnerable position and if we are unable to see the attack for what it is or recognize its attendant vulnerabilities we invite a counter attack.

To stand alone in no man's land takes courage and places us in a positional crisis, which invites opportunity. It is not necessarily a thing of weakness, perhaps it is the exact opposite.

So when you find yourself in an argument or a negotiation, take a step back, see if there are different perspectives that you might not have seen or ideas that you might not have considered...who knows, you might see an opportunity that previously was hidden from view. ☺

Stubborn or Determined

I was talking with a couple of my black belts the other day concerning the difference between being stubborn and determined. I know that we have covered this ground before, but it might be worth the revisit, after all there is more here than a mere semantic distinction.

Stubborn implies a narrow, resistant, non-yielding, brittle quality, whereas determined implies a more open, pliable quality.

People who are stubborn tend to be entrenched and unwilling to budge from a position...which is probably why detergent commercials used to describe stains as "stubborn."

People who are determined will overcome any obstacle. They will find a way over, through, around or under any obstacle that stands between them and their goal. Determined people suffer setbacks, but are not derailed by them. Determined people do not quit when the going gets tough. Determined people get up when they get knocked over.

From a purely pragmatic perspective I am determined to build my business into a success. I am determined for the business to reach its potential. Very rarely in the life of my business have I had to be stubborn. Running a business requires an ability to flow, change, adapt, bend, be flexible and in many ways bears a lot resemblance to training in the martial arts. Running a business is sometimes like the Judo of Commerce or the Judo of Economics. Having said this, there are times to be determined and there are times to be stubborn. There are times to find a new route to the top of the mountain and there are times to stand your ground in defense of a position.

The art, of course is to know when to be stubborn and when to be determined. Our son has a good helping of both traits about his character...he can be as stubborn as a mule and at other times he can be so determined to finish a task that everything else fades from his mind. Sometimes being stubborn backfires on him, as does being determined...especially if being determined to finish playing with his trains conflicts with his instruction to clean his teeth and put his toys away before bedtime. At such times, determination can become stubbornness and then things gen-

erally go downhill as parent and child take entrenched positions about what will happen next in the Dewey household.

I owe my parents so much. They gave me the opportunity to become a martial artist and they gave me the freedom to follow my dreams. Out of those opportunities has come our son and our business. Both have taught me so much about being determined or being stubborn. I have learned about when one is more appropriate than the other. I have learned that in the Judo of life, being determined is much more useful to me than being stubborn, although there are rare occasions when stubborn is the only answer.

I have also learned that being stubborn both in the Judo of life and the Judo of the martial arts, normally ends up with me flat on my back, wondering what just hit me. Masterful Judo is all about learning to sense the flow of energy around you, between you and your partner and to act accordingly. The action is a response to an awareness of energy flow, which implies a dynamic relationship between sensation and response.

All too frequently, when we become stubborn, we close down our ability to feel the flow of energy. At that point we become solid, immovable walls waiting to be destroyed by a stronger force than that with which we can resist the attack. More often than not successful Judo is determined, not stubborn.

Another aspect of this is that being stubborn tends to be about win/lose whereas being determined can easily be about win/win situations. Personally, I'll take win/win scenarios over win/lose scenarios every day, but that's me.

Here's a challenge for you: The next few times you find yourself facing an obstacle or roadblock in life ask yourself if you are being determined or stubborn. If you are being stubborn ask yourself if you put the rock in your own path. If the answer to that question is "yes", then ask yourself why you did it. If you are being determined ask yourself how many ways around your present obstacle you can find, then ask yourself, which of the answers represents the best win/win scenario. You might also ask yourself if you are placing the obstacle in your own path to learn something...if so....what? ☺

September						
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24	25	26	27	28	29	30

August						
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20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30	31		

- ◆ Nick Lowe Judo clinic, Peachtree City, GA, August 19th, 2006
- ◆ SMAC karate Tournament, Greenwood, MS, August 19th, 2006
- ◆ SMAA Open House clinic, September 2nd, 2006
- ◆ Bull dog bash, M.S.U., September 8th, 2006
- ◆ John Pellegrini, Combat Hapkido seminar, Winona, MS, September 9th, 2006
- ◆ Louisiana Open Judo Tournament, Baton Rouge, LA, September 30th, 2006
- ◆ Akayama clinic, Birmingham, AL, October 28th, 2006.
- ◆ Akayama Winter Camp, Orange Beach, AL, MLK weekend, January, 2007

*Grand Re-opening events coming in
Early September, lots of fun activities and en-
rollment incentives will be offered....for details*

*Call Becky **TODAY** 323 5522*

*We are looking for YOU to help fill
our dojo to the rafters.*

*Will YOU be one of our **BLACK
BELTS?***

*See Becky **TODAY**
106 S Lafayette*