

Pathways

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

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***“Eighty percent
of success is just
showing up.”***

—Woody Allen

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Responsibility

One of the color stripes in our children’s program is tied to the character trait of Personal Responsibility. Our students must earn the stripe as requirement for obtaining a purple belt. When you look at the Children’s manual you will find several parts to personal responsibility.

Let’s start with two of the big things you hear from people who have yet to learn personal responsibility: “It’s not my fault” and “It’s not my problem.” Taking responsibility for yourself requires a lot of honesty and self-belief. It’s not just about not blaming people, events or circumstances for our current situation, it is about recognizing that where we are now is an exact function of all the decisions that we have made to this point in our lives. For some of us, that can be a difficult pill to swallow.

People who take personal responsibility for their lives recognize that there will be setbacks and failures along the way. They recognize that they make false assumptions and act on inaccurate or incomplete information when they make decisions. People for whom personal responsibility is a hallmark of their character, however, are also aware that the person they become and what they achieve is entirely their own choice. They understand that they will fall over in life many times, but that ultimately, failure is not an option. Success is assured because people who take personal responsibility use self-discipline to persist in achieving their goals. They are aware that if they don’t take responsibility for their own goals, then no-one else is going to come along

and do it for them. It’s like hoping to become rich by purchasing a lottery ticket every month, but saving nothing. Sure, there is a mathematical probability that you could win the lottery, but while you wait for that chance to happen, others will be taking the initiative upon themselves to safeguard their family and their future by putting aside some money every month.

So where am I going with all this? It’s really very simple. Disappointments and setbacks are a fact of life. People who take personal responsibility accept those setbacks as a natural part of life rather than blame them on other people or circumstances. Personal responsibility is the quality that gives us the ability to bounce back in life. How you face your setbacks in life will determine whether you quit or keep going. If you accept that only you can achieve your goals then personal responsibility will give you resilience, when the world seems to crumble around you. We have said this before: Crisis = Risk + Opportunity. Personal responsibility will allow you to see an event as an opportunity to learn, to grow and to move forward rather than an opportunity to blame, whine and complain about the fairness of life. In a lot of ways, taking personal responsibility is very liberating, because you know who is in control of your direction in life, who you need to turn to and what resources you have to draw upon. It’s also a journey of discovery and wonder as you learn things about yourself and unearth latent talents that you never knew existed. ☺

Timing and Dominoes

Timing is everything....right? We have discussed this in the past, and talked about how we make time for the things that are important to us. It recently came to my attention that one of my students this semester has changed [their] university class schedule to make time to take martial arts classes, because the student felt that the benefits gained from martial arts training exceeded the benefits to be gained from taking a different class. Now obviously I am going to appear biased here, but think about this for a moment. If a student takes a class in his or her major area of interest, there are clear educational advantages..... getting a degree sooner, learning required course materials, getting a broader preparation for one's career and so on. Taking a martial arts class brings none of those specific benefits unless you want to become a professional martial artist. So why do it?

Why would a person decide that a martial arts class is more important to them than (for instance) an extra chemistry class?

I would suggest to you that the possibility exists that in martial arts we learn things that have a domino effect in our lives.

Last month I wrote about the magic of martial arts working in the background of our lives where we don't see it. And yet, at the same time it is operating right in front of our eyes, if we just have the vision to see it. Students who see the benefits of taking martial arts see the domino effect; they recognize that cascade theory works in a synergetic way in their lives. The benefits of training in martial arts can be immediately felt in

other areas of life, making us more efficient, more effective, more compassionate, caring and thoughtful. At the same time we reach higher levels of fitness, we have greater energy and less stress. We find ourselves more disciplined and more able to concentrate and focus with a clear mind. There is a cascade of benefits that enable and ennoble us, both in the short and the long term.

Perhaps the first things and most obvious things we notice are an increase in fitness levels and a higher level of energy from day to day. Then perhaps we begin to notice that we let fewer things get to us and stresses start to fall away. It takes time to undo the work of a lifetime, but slowly our bodies and minds become lighter and our actions and thoughts more graceful and precise. Sooner or later we witness ourselves in action and become aware of what we are doing. This is an interesting time because as soon as you become aware that you are (for instance) less stressed, you notice the inverse...you become aware of when you have let stress pile up again. An interesting corollary to this is what happens when we step away from training for any period of time. Perhaps it is for exams, or because we have moved and changed jobs, perhaps it is because we have been ill. Regardless of the reason, when we return to our training we can "feel" the ground that we have lost in physical fitness. The big issue here though, is that the ground lost is easier to recover than it was to take in the first place. Once your body and mind know what is expected of them and what they are capable of achieving, we are much

less willing to settle for less. We are less apt to get discouraged by setbacks and much more likely to see the progress that we make.

So all in all, my student's notion that taking a martial arts class was of more benefit than taking some other class is probably an elevated view of the world and her life needs as compared to the needs of the moment.

If the mental skills learned have trickle down effects into other aspects of learning and living, and if the physical skills translate into a higher level of fitness and wellness, and the skills of the heart translate to a higher level of determination and dedication to self improvement; then we would all do well to heed the example.

The fact of the matter is that all of us find time for the things that are important to us and we hide behind excuses for everything else. Unfortunately the choices that we make about what is important to us at the time may have very little bearing on what brings us the greatest benefit in the long run. We are creatures of instant gratification, and not very experienced at delaying gratification for the possibility of a greater benefit later. Too late, we see that an opportunity presented now, will not be repeated and we pay the price of regret later. I can look at my own life and see where this has been true.

As we get older we hope that others might benefit from our experiences, but the fact remains that we must each walk our own path and eventually come to realize that no-one can gain experience or value by proxy.

“Dreams are able to come true for anybody who works hard and works at it.”

—Otis Harris from Edwards, Mississippi, 400 meters Silver Medal, 2004 Olympic Games

Natural Ability

As I sit here in the early hours of the morning writing, I am thinking about a topic that I have discussed on a number of occasions recently with people in different areas of my life. I am referring to what we consider to be talent. Generally I tend to think that when we see someone do something well, that seems to be, (for the person doing the observing at least), easy, we call the person we are watching “talented.”

Now I have never thought of myself as having much in the way of talent at anything. If I have any talents at all in life, they are in being highly organized, and being doggedly persistent about what I want to achieve. So perhaps I have a different view of talent. Some people have an innate ability at something...let’s say playing the piano. Others like me, when given the opportunity to play a piano, are exceptionally talented at clearing the room!

On the surface of it, there seems to be no effort required by the “virtuoso”, but I would suspect that if you scratch the surface, you will find that talent only goes so far. Sooner or later, sweat, toil, effort, failure, determination, persistence and resilience to setbacks become the true talents that lead to a virtuoso performance.

Brian Tracy made the comment on one of the CD’s I was listening to the other day, akin to the following: That stupidity was doing the same thing over and over and expecting a different outcome whereas intelligent people recognize when their efforts are not achieving the desired result and modify their actions until the desired result is achieved.

There are several very clear issues here:

1. Having a desired outcome.
2. Recognizing whether you are on target
3. Being willing to change.

Over the years I have run into some amazingly talented individuals

in my academic life, in my martial arts life and in other parts of my world. But it seems to me that in the long run, the ones that got the furthest or achieved the most were the ones who were willing to see things through. Talent is not enough. Frequently, I have seen situations where talent is a limiting factor, simply because a person found something too easy and there was no challenge, so the talent got in the way of progress. Put another way around, we sometimes take for granted the results that we achieve on the strength of talent alone, whereas we often value more highly the things for which we have had to work.

Over the years as a national referee in Judo, I have seen a lot of “really talented” young people on the tournament circuit who fade away as they enter adolescence. At the same time, I have seen some “not so talented” souls stick with it and eventually become truly impressive competitors. Now obviously this works both ways, but I am always saddened when I see someone who has a “natural flair” for Judo competition reach a certain level of performance, hit a competitive wall, then eventually drop out. Talent on its own will only carry us so far, eventually we find our limits. It’s what we do at that point in the process that determines our success or failure.

I truly believe that we all have abilities of which we are dimly aware and that given the right opportunities we can all appear “talented.” I also believe that any of us who chooses to, can put forth enough effort to achieve results that others might call talented. The key issues are:

1. Whether or not we are willing to invest the time and effort
2. Whether it is important enough to us to become successful
3. Whether we are willing to cast aside our own pre-conceptions
4. Whether we are willing to

start at a low enough level and be patient

5. Whether we are willing to persist when the results don’t match our expectations.

I don’t think that these issues are really any different for so called “talented” folk except perhaps they get a leg up on the learning curve.

When you watch truly inspiring performances in a concert hall or in the Olympics you are looking at the result of untold hours of personal sacrifice to hone the skills necessary to turn in a world class performance. There may have been talent there to get the person started, but that’s not what led them to the spotlight or the winner’s circle. Ultimately the willingness to pay the price to get to the goal is the determining factor. What are you willing to do to get where you want to go in life? What price are you willing to pay when setbacks come? What are you willing to sacrifice in order to achieve your end result? What personal issues are you willing to face and overcome to maximize your true potential?

Find the answers to those questions and you will have a good idea of whether you will achieve your goals or not.

You see, it comes back to Brian Tracy again....If you want to achieve something, but are not willing to do what it takes, then you are not behaving in the most intelligent fashion possible.

For people who display what others call talent; good enough, never is. When everyone else around has quit and gone home, the talented individual will be burning the midnight oil and squeaking out one more repetition on his or her journey to personal excellence.

It’s that simple.☺

Commitment

Let's come back to time management for a moment or two. Earlier today I was having a conversation with a student who was telling me about how he always wished to do martial arts, but that he had never been able to find the time. Now we don't need to go into the particulars of the case, but the illustration is quite provocative to me.

I wondered to myself why he was deluding himself? Then, later I wondered how much we all do something similar. When I finally keel over, I don't want to be lying on my death bed saying... "I wish I had found the time to _____." Ever since I read John Hunt's book "The Ascent of Everest", when I was ten, I have wanted to go to the Himalayas. I have not yet found the time! It is one of my life goals. When I sit down and list out everything I want to achieve in the next five or ten years in each area of my life, when I get to the travel list, the Himalayas is always at the top of the list. The problem is, that other things are currently more important. So am I deluding myself? I don't think so.

The reason I have not yet been to the Himalayas is because I see it as a luxury in which I can indulge, when I have met other, higher priority goals. This summer my wife and I took our son to the coast for a short vacation. I can honestly say that I cannot recall taking a vacation in that sense since I opened the business...there never seems to be the time...other things are always more important. Am I deluding myself? Yes.

I tend to think that I can keep going, doing what I do, day after day without taking vacations. That's delusional.

Time management is about personal honesty.

Ever since I started grad school in England, I have been able to work on relatively few hours sleep and get in-

ordinate amounts of work done, when I believe in the task at hand. Once I get caught up in a project, time sails by unnoticed, I don't feel tired and I don't feel drained. I feel invigorated by the process and the project. When it's done, I will crash for a few days and allow the system to rejuvenate. It may seem crazy to others, but to me it's fun! Give me a project to which I am committed and then stand back! It's my system, I have used it for decades and it serves me well. I would not recommend it to others.

What I am telling you here is that we all have the same amount of time to use, it is merely a question of being honest with yourself about what is truly important to you and then getting on with doing it. Did you ever notice in school how the subjects you did not enjoy seemed to drag by and how time flew by when you enjoyed the subject? You cannot delude yourself into doing something. You can play make believe you want something, but if you are not taking action steps towards getting there, then perhaps you need to ask yourself if you really want it.

When I see students making excuses for not being in class either at university or in the martial arts, I know their hearts are not in the enterprise. Conversely, when I see students going out of their way to find more time for something I know that it is something to which they are committed. So the questions come down to this: To what are you truly committed? What things are you willing to spend your time doing? What are you going to be wishing you had done when you drop dead? Whatever the answers to the questions, be honest and move in that direction. Life's way too short and uncertain to spend it doing things that you neither believe in or cannot commit to with any degree of fervor. ☺

SEPTEMBER						
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OCTOBER						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S
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24	25	26	27	28	29	30
31						

UPCOMING EVENTS

- ◆ **BOKKEN SEMINAR, SMAA, VAN BUSHNELL CLINICIAN. SEPTEMBER 17 & 18TH, 2004**
- ◆ **GENTLE WIND JUDO TOURNAMENT, BATON ROUGE, LA, SEPTEMBER 25TH, 2004**
- ◆ **INTERNATIONAL MARTIAL ARTS SYMPOSIUM, COLUMBIA SOUTH CAROLINA. OCTOBER 1ST -3RD, 2004**
- ◆ **PEACHTREE JUDO TOURNAMENT, PEACHTREE CITY, GA, OCTOBER 9TH, 2004.**
- ◆ **PROJECT ACTION KICK A THON, SMAA, OCTOBER 16TH, 2004**
- ◆ **BLACK BELT RANK DEMONSTRATIONS IN TAEKWONDO, SMAA, OCTOBER 25, 2004**
- ◆ **BLACK BELT RANK DEMONSTRATIONS IN JUDO, SMAA, OCTOBER 28, 2004.**
- ◆ **JU JITSU RANK DEMONSTRATIONS, SMAA, NOVEMBER 2ND, 2004**
- ◆ **MISSISSIPPI JUDO TOURNAMENT, RAYMOND, MS OCTOBER 16TH, 2004**
- ◆ **MELTON'S JUDO TOURNAMENT, JACKSON, MS. NOVEMBER 20TH, 2004**
- ◆ **AKAYAMA WINTER CAMP, GULF SHORES, MLK WEEK-END, JANUARY 2005**

***Project Action Kick-a-Thon
October 16th***

We have 6 SMAA students here on scholarship, and we need to continue to support them. Don't miss this event!

***Bring-a-Buddy Week
October 4th-10th***

***Bring your friends in for a free class!
Beginners are invited to both the
Beginning and Advanced classes.***

***This is a great opportunity for us to
share what we have to offer; take
advantage of it!***