

# Pathways

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*"Thoughts are energy  
and you can make your  
world or break your  
world by your thinking"*

Susan L. Taylor

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## Failure or Success?

I had a bit of an epiphany last night. I was chatting with one of my closest friends and he made the comment in reference to a sort of contemporary double speak that "we don't fail, we succeed at different things." He was being mildly sarcastic.

It crossed my mind that I have often used the statement that we fail our way to success in this newsletter, and I know I use the line in class a lot.... both at the university and at the martial arts school.

So what's the difference?

As an entrepreneur I am acutely aware of when I am failing. In tournament, I know when I lose a match. There is no denying the obvious, no matter how my ego might like to sugar coat it and present my failings as an opportunity to succeed in another direction.

The essence of the matter it seems, comes to this: If we fail our way to success, then we take full responsibility for each and every failure, regardless of the enormity of that failure. There is an admission of, an accountability for, and an ownership of the failure.

When we don't fail, but rather delude ourselves that we are succeeding at different things we are ignoring some pretty huge lessons.

It seems that in school these days we don't want our children to fail because it hurts their self esteem. I would be inclined to argue the exact opposite, if we do not learn about failure, if we don't fall flat on our faces and stand up again, we never learn the skill of recovery and renewal. We lose an inner strength.

Failure is a critical step in the growth

of character. I tend to be of the belief that if we don't learn to fall over in the little things of life, when life hands us a major crisis, we are woefully unprepared.

I also like to think of one of the most important things a baby learns to do.....walk. I don't think I have ever seen a baby stand up and walk on the first attempt and never look back. Learning to walk is a do-over kind of learning event. I am sure that somewhere out there are children who simply get up and walk and never once fall over on that particular learning curve, but I have never seen one. The thing of it is that the falling over isn't an opportunity to succeed at something else. It is a setback on the way to the goal of walking. We succeed at learning how to walk by accepting the lessons of the failed attempts along the way.

It is way too easy to deny that we have failed at something or to put blame elsewhere or to complain about the circumstances of the event. It is much harder to look an event square in the face and say to yourself: "Well, I royally messed that up!"

Life is all about pathways. One path leads you the long way round, another path may lead you through valleys of despair, while another takes us over mountaintops of euphoria....or both. On all roads are moments of success and moments of failure. Success can beguile us, failure can destroy us....if we allow them to do so. They are both imposters. They both delude. The lessons that they offer are both absolutely essential on the road of life.

## Repetition

At the risk of repeating myself, I want to talk about repetition again.

How many times have I said that repetition is the mother of skill? As I write this month's missive, I am preparing my first set of tests for my on-campus classes. I talk to my intro-level students about how to study and prepare, and a lot of what I have to say revolves around the idea of repetition.

Repetition is subtle, seemingly mindless, and perhaps unattractive in its lack of novelty.

Doing the laundry, mopping the floor for the umpteenth time, or putting the cans on the shelf at the supermarket, cutting the grass at home....they all smack ofedium.

In the martial arts, the master is the one who has done tens of thousands of reverse punches to the pad, thousands upon thousands of repetitions of the basic hip throw. There is nothing glamorous here, and therefore little to attract today's citizenry. We want our black belt now, and we don't want to go through the repetitions. We want to do it a few times and move on to something new.

We are impatient. We all want to be leaders, but we don't want to do the leadership training that takes us through the path of apprentice, novice and unskilled worker. We want to get our degree from college and parachute into management without ever having been a drone. There is, however, much meaning in "coming up through the ranks", of having "paid our dues."

One of the most under-rated aspects of repetition is the unexpected insights that it grants. Mastery in any area of performance requires diligence, dedication and commitment. Eventually the repetitions

become rote and perhaps for a while, even boring. This is the point at which most people quit. We yearn for excitement and for meaning, so we are tempted to quit when things get tough or boring. Now here is an interesting thing. In the martial arts the first few thousand repetitions of a skill (let's say a hip throw) give us an illusion that we know the thing. We think we have it down pretty well and it is time to move on to something more challenging. It is!

More repetitions of the same thing.

What?

Only when you engage in the next step does repetition reveal one of its secrets. Once the first few thousand repetitions have been done and we think we have the technique down, we begin to get bored, but at precisely that point in time....if we persist, we make a really remarkable discovery: The first few thousand reps were sloppy and really not very good at all. It's time to raise the bar of performance. It is time to re-evaluate the quality of the side kick, it is time to recognize that we have barely yet begun to climb the mountain.

So we make the commitment to ourselves and we get serious and we really start doing the repetitions in earnest.

And something really neat happens.

Every once in a while a diamond falls out of your pocket. It wasn't there when you started practice, but there it is, just for a moment. So you try and repeat it, and fail miserably, and laugh at yourself for thinking that you could pull off a second work of art only moments after the first.

You need more gestation, more failure, more maturity. The repetitions bring refinement of skill. A grace begins to emerge that speaks of economy of effort and a unity of both mind and body within

the action.

Then the mind lets go because the body knows what to do and the mind only gets in the way when it starts telling the body what to do. You don't tell your lungs to breathe in and out at the conscious level. As soon as you do, you lose the rhythm of the process.

That too is a learned skill. To become mindful of your breathing when you practice stacking the cans on the shelf, mopping the floor, doing the side kick takes you to a new level of performance. Another petal falls and another layer of the onion peels back.

Slowly, perhaps too slowly for us in today's world of high speed internet connections, the repetitions teach us about ourselves, our world and the real connections that underlie the business of every day living.

Repetitions take us out of ourselves for a time and allow us to experience the beauty that is all around us. Perhaps, for me the first moment of beauty in the martial arts was the first effortless hip throw I ever executed. It was a supreme moment of training and it is carved into my mind with a clarity that more than thirty years of distance has not dimmed in the slightest. That particular moment came for me in 1984 in Saskatchewan, after nearly a dozen years of training. There have been a few moments like that since then, but I am still doing the repetitions and learning what they have to teach.

There is still the little guy on my shoulder telling me that I have done enough and there is no more to learn. I think I like him there. He is my counter-self He doesn't really want to be a martial artist, or perhaps he knows that by tempting me he knows I will not stop. ☺

The Universe is change; our life is what our thoughts make it.

Marcus Aurelius

## Combat Range

In any martial study, sooner or later you have to come to terms with what we can call combat range.

There are four combat ranges:

Weapons range

Striking range

Grappling range

Internal range

I tend to be of the opinion that a competent martial artist is one who understands the strategic and tactical significance of each of these ranges.

Sometimes in class, a student will ask a "What if...." question. Sometimes these sorts of questions can lead down blind alleys...like "What if a sniper at a hundred yard..." O.K., so that's a somewhat rhetorical question, but you can see where we are going here.

Each tactical tool that we offer in class has a strategic significance. Each tool has an appropriate application and each student must be aware of both appropriate and inappropriate times to use a particular tactical tool. There are times to kick and punch, there are times to throw, there are times to be on the ground and grapple. Equally there are times to walk away from potential conflict and there are times to be aware of impending threat and to avoid the situation entirely, thereby defusing it before it even happens.

We offer a comprehensive package of martial arts skills at our Academy. We offer striking arts, throwing arts and grappling arts, so that our students will have the opportunity to acquire skill in all the combat ranges.

In a lot of ways we offer what in the industry today is referred to as "Mixed Martial Arts." The main difference, however, is that we offer each art as a syllabus-based structure capable of standing on its own.

Our students don't learn a little bit of kicking, throwing and grappling, they learn the lessons that will lead them to Black Belts in Taekwondo, Judo and Ju Jitsu.

Those who rank to Black Belt in Ju Jitsu have the greatest opportunity for melding all the styles we teach into a functional combat instrument, capable of dealing with all the combat ranges that affect im-

mediate personal security (snipers aside). At this point I should say that Ju Jitsu isn't simply taking Taekwondo and Judo and sticking them together. Ju Jitsu takes the principles of striking, throwing, joint locking and weapons controls and develops from them an integrated syllabus of technical skill.

Now here's an interesting point: All of the styles we teach also deal with the internal combat range, because it is here that the greatest lessons that you will ever learn in the martial arts are being quietly taught.

It does not take very long for a martial arts student to figure out that the greatest, most intractable enemy they will ever face is the self.

Each of us knows our own weaknesses and strengths. You know exactly how to undermine and sabotage your own success. You know your fears and you know whether or not you are willing to face them. You know when you are deluding yourself, and you know when you are compromising your standards. This is true for each and every one of us.....whether we like it or not.....whether we admit it or not.

I have discovered as part of my own journey, that the lessons are tougher as I go along. It is as though each previous lesson teaches us something of value that will help us to face the next challenge, which will be bigger than the last.

After forty years of training, the challenges I face are in the core of my being. Gone are the fears of competition or the need to win. These things were important lessons when I was younger, but continually putting myself back on the line taught me what I needed to learn. I play now for the pure joy of performance, for the beauty in the dance.

As I have said many times before, the competition mat held up a mirror in front of me and showed just exactly who and what I was on any given day. Competition had some valuable lessons to teach me.

So my message is simply this: Each style of martial art offers something specific to a combat range. If it fails to do so, it may look pretty, but in the end it is just a movement set devoid of any real applica-

Equally, if all you learn is kicking and punching, then you are more vulnerable at the grappling range. If all you learn is grappling, then you will have a tougher time protecting yourself from kicks and punches. You can look at the martial arts like a pie. Each art is a piece of the pie and you can only see the whole pie when you have all the pieces. Taking this approach allows you to see merit in each style and to see something of value to be learned.

I think that one of the reasons that each style brings us face to face with the internal range is that each style will make us face our own limitations and fears. By way of illustration: Judo may make you face your own fear of falling or Karate may make you face your fear of getting hit. In each case you have only two choices: Face the fear and do it anyway, or walk away. Only one choice leads to personal growth.

For sure there may be very legitimate reasons for the fears we acquire, but personal growth almost demands of each of us that we face our fears sooner or later. Fear of falling or fear of getting hit may seem like simple fears to overcome to you, but I have seen students paralyzed into inaction by these same fears. I have watched adults face childhood traumas buried deep within and finally let them go, and embrace a newfound freedom in life. At this level, the fear of falling is not a simple physical fear, it is a deep, embedded, visceral fear which represents the physical appearance of something else. Every time the student comes to class and makes the choice to take one more fall, there is internal work going on at the same time. It is only a matter of time before the fear will go away.

Anyone who has taught martial arts for any length of time has watched this sort of scenario unfold time and time again. The martial arts are nothing but a mirror.

If we have the courage to look in the mirror, there is much to be learned. Now that's close range combat!

☺

## Children's Program

Several events this summer both inside and outside the dojo have made me think long and hard about our Children's Program and what it is that we are attempting to provide.

First and foremost our dojo is committed to personal growth, that is our mantra. We desire to learn and grow and become better than we were. Our goal is to provide tools that help each member face and overcome personal challenges and obstacles and we use the martial arts as a tool to assist the process. The road to black belt is not intended to be easy, nor is it intended to be walked by those who are not ready to make the commitment to themselves. We each come to the path in our own time and that is as it should be.

With regard to the children's program there are four aspects of training that we believe are essential. We can list them as being:

- Technical knowledge
- Class Attendance
- Class Behavior
- Application of the lessons outside the dojo.

We use a variety of tools to help us achieve our goals. We use a Black Belt Kid's Sheet, which is intended to track whether one of our students is using personal responsibility, initiative and leadership skills at home and at school. We track attendance and we have expectations of behavior in class. When you add these to the technical requirements of rank, you have a fairly robust mechanism for our stripe system that will allow our young students to mature into excellent Black Belts at the appropriate age.

We do not promote children to Black Belt until we see that they understand the responsibilities of carrying that rank. I can honestly tell you that all the children who have graduated from our children's class, joined the adult program and who now wear the Black Belt rank are students of whom we are immensely proud. Each one of them has taken to heart the lesson that we have attempted to instill in their own way. Each one is unique. We do not make cookie cutter Black Belts. Each young adult has his or her own talents and has learned different lessons along the way to Black Belt. Each one of them has learned that Black Belt is not the end of the jour-

ney, but just the beginning. Each one of them has had challenges along the way. Several of them have struggled with frustration, lack of commitment and/or behavioral challenges that stood in the way of progress, but each and every one of them has overcome their challenges and it was my honor to grant the Black Belt rank to each of them at the appointed time. Some of these students have gone on to become salaried instructors in our Children's program. Some of them are now in university. The point that I want to stress is that we are only assistants in the process. Each child has to do the work for him or herself. No-one else can do the work. For certain in all our success stories there is a phenomenal support team behind the child, but only the child can make the choice to commit to Black Belt.

When I look at the children who have earned Black Belt from our Academy I see so much more than just the rank. I see the perseverance, the determination, the commitment, the dedication to excellence, the teamwork. Was I just talking about the children? Actually, I was also talking about their parents, their school teachers, scout masters, ministers and all the other members of the team who stand often quietly in the background offering guidance as the child walks the path of learning and maturity.

Starting out with a five or six year-old white belt and staying the course to a fourteen or fifteen year-old black belt is not easy. I am awed by the levels of parental dedication and support that such a task entails.

So, in a lot of ways, this article isn't just about the children's program, it is a **huge** thank you to the parents who give up their time, who come to us with their challenges, who are willing to tell us when we mess up and who are willing to help us find solutions...because when all is said and done the most important person in the process is the child. Each child is a unique gift to humanity and it is our chosen task to help prepare these children to build a better world than the one into which we brought them. It is our hope that when it is their time to become parents and teachers, they will be better able to do the same for their children. ☺

September						
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3	4	5	6	7	8	9
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17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30

August						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S
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6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30	31		

- ◆ SMAC Karate Tournament Ridgel and, MS, September 16th, 2006
- ◆ Louisiana Open Judo Tournament, Baton Rouge, LA, September 30th, 2006
- ◆ Project Action Kick-A-Thon, SMAA, October 14th, 2006
- ◆ SMAC Karate Tournament, Greenwood, October 21st, 2006.
- ◆ Akayama clinic, Birmingham, AL, October 28th, 2006.
- ◆ Ippon Open Judo Tournament, Peachtree City, GA, October 28th, 2006.
- ◆ Akayama Winter Camp, Orange Beach, AL, MLK weekend, January, 2007
- ◆ Wakamusha Judo Tournament, Atlanta, GA February 7th, 2007.

*If you don't have sparring gear...now would be  
a really good time to get some.....*

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*And find out why*

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

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

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