

Do What You See Yourself Doing

Shihan Tony Annesi, © 2009, Bushido-kai

Sometimes when considering things appropriate to novices, a more experienced approach is beneficial.

After you, as a potential student of the martial arts, have made all the phone calls you intend to make, have charted the information you need, have visited the schools that appeal to you, you have two more decisions: “Which is the martial art for me?” and “Which is the school for me?” Unfortunately the answers do not always concur at the same locale.

The logical way to go about this decision process is called the Ben Franklin method. Old Ben used to use this all the time to, in Davy Crockett’s phrase, “make sure he was right and then go ahead.” Ben simply divided a piece of paper vertically and put the positives of one art (style or school) on the right and the negatives on the left. You can make several lists, one for each art, and one for each school. Which is the longer list? If this is unsatisfactory, you might try “weighting the values,” that is, giving each reason a point value according to how important it is to you. For example, “top quality instruction” might get a value of 3 while “close to my home” might get a value of 1. Do the same with negative values on the left side. Add up the scores. Do the positives out-weigh the negatives? Which art or school has the highest resulting value?

If, after doing this, you feel funny about the decision, that probably means that you unconsciously need to create a higher point value for one or more of your reasons. You are subtly telling yourself you don’t like the objective-and-rational-looking decision you have just made. That’s okay. Here is another method to check if those values are weighted well for you: future-pace.

Future Pacing is an exercise in which you mentally put on the uniform of the school or schools you are considering (one at a time, please), and attend your first class. Now jump ahead a month and do the same thing. Now a year. A few years. If it feels good, you probably have discovered what quality made it feel that way. Give it a higher point value.

Indeed, this process, done carefully and with sincere feeling, might make the decision for you. How you *feel* about your decision may be ultimately more important than how you *think* you should feel about it.

Putting yourself through this discipline has a lot of hidden benefits. First, it takes you away from the on-the-spot decision the martial arts salesperson wants you to make. It gives you both the time and the opportunity to be rational *and* to be emotional about your decision. It allows you to experience that which you cannot experience. Oh, I know that you are fantasizing and that sometimes fantasy can be disappointed by the reality of training, but if your future pacing is based on gathered information and real observation, it is likely to be more accurate than you would normally expect.

With this little exercise you can “feel” how the movements of the specific art will feel, get a sense of the safety in the school, of the personalities interacting, of the emotion you will experience when correct, when you learn a skill, when you are discouraged because things are not going perfectly, and when you are encouraged

because you have achieved. You can sense the spirit that the environment offers and determine if it is nourishing or somewhat off-putting. If you are unclear about what your imagination is telling you, you can always use that feedback to get more information and then do the exercise again.

Naturally, the real thing will not exactly duplicate your future pacing. You have to be willing to adapt on the fly as in any situation. But future pacing allows you to do what you have seen and decide to continue doing what you have seen yourself doing. Then, and only then, take the Nike commercial's advice: "Just do it."

Next week, we'll discuss the difference between serious martial artists and Hollywood hopefuls.