

Three Kinds of People

Ono Jirouemon, master swordsman, once said that there were three kinds of people: the fool who makes mistakes and never learns from them, the average man who makes mistakes but corrects them, and the superior man who recognizes mistakes made by others so he will not make them himself.

Beginners aren't fools who make mistakes and never learn from them, but those who make mistakes and refuse to learn from them will forever be beginners. I have seen them wearing all kinds of color on their belts. The darker the belt, the more they are skilled in disguising their mistakes from others and from themselves at the risk of maybe having to face themselves and reality.

The average student makes average mistakes and learns from them at an average rate, but is usually so involved with his own development that he pays no attention to other people in class, thus fails to learn from an important source of knowledge—other people's mistakes and Sensei's corrections of them. I see this happen most when kids are making the transition from children's class to the adult class. They may be too mature and talented for the kids' classes but often are not fully ready for the concentrated learning of the adult class. They are used to teachers winning their attention, explaining the assignments both before and after they are given, letting them know when to take notes, or exactly what will be important for the next exam. Not so in martial arts classes. If I am lecturing or showing a technique, I often see the youngest members of class take the opportunity to inspect the paneling, the weapons rack, or some kanji on the wall. Sure, they pay attention when *they* are corrected, but figure that any other corrections or instructions do not apply to them—after all, I did not make a big point of it, tell them it would be on the next exam, or insist they put it in their notes. Luckily most young teenagers grow out of being just average students who can learn only if corrected personally.

Black belts, however, at least the ones I am used to teaching, correct their own mistakes, take other corrections to heart, try to understand how techniques work, and at the same time, figure how they could go about teaching the material to lower ranks.

No learner, no matter which these types he is, learns without overcoming problems. The poorer the learner, the more he feels that he should be learning without having to face problems. Conversely, a great learner is eager to take on problems because he understands that problems create learning and overcoming problems creates options. Recognizing options is what makes knowledge reach upward toward wisdom.

Is this not what training is all about? In training you get to be all three kinds of people but aspire, at least your instructors hope you will aspire, to be the last kind, the superior man, woman, and child who learns from the mistakes others make so as to minimize their own.

Ono Jirouemon, founder of Ono-ha Itto-ryu, once said that there were three kinds of people. The fool, who makes mistakes and never learns from them, never learns. The average man, who makes

mistakes but corrects them, learns but at a slow rate. The superior man, who recognizes mistakes made by others so he will not make them himself, learns quickly and just may become a master if not of a martial art, than of himself.