

Acting, Taekwon-Do and Success

“Life is a performance, and you are just one of the actors, play your part well.”

- Kimonako

My primary school motto was “To be your very best”. It wasn’t until the other day when I drove past my old school, that I realised this is the motto that I have been living my adult life to. Uncannily (or not) being my best and being someone who inspires others is the key driving force behind all I do. Have I always performed at my best? – No. Have I always been the best? – Sometimes. Do I have room to improve? – Always. Why? Because we all have personality traits, that are considered strengths or weaknesses when working towards and achieving a goal or desire. I believe it is our job during this lifetime to identify what those strengths and weaknesses are for our individual self and harness them to be our best and achieve our goals.

To achieve goals in life big or small, you need to go through a process. For me, it was through my career and hobby that I really started to understand, and more importantly practice the **process to success**. Furthermore, I realised that in order to be ‘successful’ in achieving my goals and desires I would need to develop a specific set of key traits or attributes. As it turns out, the lessons that I was learning from acting (my career) paralleled those of Taekwon-Do (my hobby) hence I would often refer to the two as “the train tracks of my life” which would lead me to success. Therefore, I will use them as comparative examples to explain the *process to success* and the underlying key attributes you need to develop and apply to achieve **success** in ANY area of your life.

For the purpose of this essay, I define **Success** as “the accomplishment of an aim or goal or purpose, that is internal (inside of one’s self) or external (as seen in the physical world)”. Here I would like to add that if you achieve development of what we deem “internal attributes” you will, achieve the “external physical manifestation”.

The Process

Everything you want to create is a process, and requires completion of each step as you work towards achieving a goal or a desire.

In acting terms we can break this ‘process’ into three broad steps;

- 1) Preparation,
- 2) Rehearsal, and
- 3) Performance.

Because these steps are relevant to every area of our life whether it be career, relationships, health, finances, or hobbies, I can also apply it to Taekwon-Do (TKD) goals such as; Training for grading, teaching classes, trialing for the New Zealand team, or competing at International competitions.

1. Preparation

In the preparation phase of -

Acting

Actors need to: Choose to audition, learn their lines, analyse the script, set acting intentions, make character choices, research the role, practice self belief, and face their fears.

Taekwon-Do

A practitioner needs to: Choose a club and start training, learn their patterns, learn basic skills in all areas (breaking, patterns, step sparring and so on), write up lesson plans, and set their personal goals for the sport.

2. Rehearsal

During the rehearsal phase of -

Acting

An actor needs to: Practice their lines and run the scene continually with other actors, take risks, harness their emotional tool box, run the scene with costume changes, props, blocking of movement, and really rehearse the scene in performance mode.

Taekwon-Do

A practitioner needs to: Practise their patterns, self defense, sparring drills or breaks, refine the movements, take new risks and try new ways, practice as though it were a real performance.

3. Performance

During the performance phase of:

Acting

An actor needs to: Be confident in their preparation, face performance fears, emotionally prepare, be present and in the moment with their fellow actors, show integrity, and have fun.

During an actor's career, they also need to deal with failure, have confidence in themselves and their ability to maintain self-belief.

The above is also true for a Taekwon-Do practitioner whether performing as a student, a teacher, a competitor, or a gradee.

The Key Attributes

Using acting and Taekwon-Do as comparative examples you can see there are the same underlying key attributes in each process and will be summarised here as: Instincts, imagination, intention setting, focus, risk takers, emotional control, hard

work, self belief, and sense of fun. These are also the attributes displayed by people considered “the most successful in the world”, some of whom were; Thomas Edison, Mohamed Ali, Albert Einstein, Bruce Lee and Michael Jackson. We all have the ability to harness these traits and some will come more naturally to you than others. However, like any skill each one needs to be trained and developed to really master it.

Instincts

There are those who don't know whether they listen to their instincts, or even how to do so. Therefore I describe instincts here as your 'gut instinct' or, 'that little voice within' which can be recognised through; meditation and quieting the mind, just “knowing what to do”, and synchronistic events. For example, you may be wondering what martial art to do and then signs or people show up that just so happen to mention the same art. Coincidence?

When I started Taekwon-Do it was pure instinct that lead me to it. There was a little voice inside that continually told me to start a martial art, so I did. This is a lesson that I had learnt in my life already. Five years prior to becoming a TKD practitioner I had started training as an actress purely because that little voice had told me for years to do it, but my focus had been on having a career in Marine Biology and I wasn't ready to stray from that childhood dream. From the first class I attended in acting and TKD I fell in love with the activities and aimed to take each one as far as I could. Little did I know then, that my instincts had lead me to the two activities that would help develop self-awareness and train the attributes I believe are needed for success.

In acting you have to follow your instincts when you need to improvise a scene. Sometimes script development comes from improvising with fellow actors and playing around with characters and what they would say or do under imaginary circumstances. Actors also need to follow their instincts when going for an audition and they haven't been told how to play out the script. Instead, they use their ideas of how they should play it and hope that it stands out from other actors auditioning.

In TKD you need to follow your instincts all the time; when refereeing, in self-defense, when choosing a club, and especially when you are sparring and in the ring.

Imagination

“Imagination is everything, it is the preview to life's coming attractions”

- Albert Einstein

Without Imagination we wouldn't have been able to create any of the worlds inventions. Imagination and creativity is something we all have, but our ability to imagine something can sometimes vary. The uses of imagination are very broad which makes it a key attribute for success.

Actors need to access the imagination for different reasons:

- To imagine scenarios which will engage their emotions and really prepare them for a scene. Because if they don't have the appropriate underlying current of emotion the scene will not feel real and the audience will not connect to them.
- To come up with new characters, ideas, and ultimately believe their imaginary situation and 'play off' other actors in improvised ways.
- As a visionary tool to create a vision of what they would like to create in their life, for example; To envision their audition or play being successful,

We all know that without creativity and imagination new things wouldn't be created. It is not a secret anymore that visualization or as some term it "day dreaming" creates success. Thomas Edison and Einstein both commented on how they would "day dream" each day and it was at those times that they would come up with their best solutions to problems. It is now widely used and recommended to athletes as it is proved to increase their ability to perform better without having to train physically harder.

The point to visualization is that you **imagine** in your minds eye how you would like a situation to turn out. If its an audition you may imagine the end result is the casting director shaking your hand saying that it was a great read through, or your agent ringing you to say to booked the role. In TKD it may be that you visualize yourself on the podium receiving the medal, or after a grading where the judges tell you, you did a great job, or you simply being able to perform a kick technically well. In life it may be the increase in your bank account, or the employer telling you, you got the job. What ever it is you want, you need to **see, feel** and **believe** that what you want has already happened. As quantum physics states, the mind cannot decipher between what's real and what's imaginary and will therefore bring into your life what you think about and **focus** on. The reason for this is because everything vibrates on some level (chairs, tables, people, money), including thoughts and the universal law of attraction states that like attracts like. Which ultimately means that items that vibrate at some level will attract other items on the same level. Since your thoughts are things and vibrate, they create what you see in the world. Given time all your thoughts will turn up in its physical state based on the level of emotion that you attach to it. Therefore you need to be careful of what you think about. This was the case for World Cup. Coincidentally I found myself competing in the patterns that I was more worried about performing and hence thought about the most before the competition.

Intentions

In everyday life whether your aware of it or not, we live through our intentions. Whether it be the intention to: Get a job done, to make someone happy, to not be late for work, to land a dream role or win a sparring match. Underlying intentions are what motivates us or drives us to act or say the things that we do, moment to moment.

When an actor works through a script, their preparation involves understanding their characters intentions. What does each line mean? Why am I saying it? What does the other person mean when they say....?

In daily life to truly understand another person and what they want from you, you need to look to their intentions. Your mother's intention may be to keep you safe, your boss may intend to get you to finish a project, a salesperson's intention is to get you to spend your money. Whatever the intention is you need to find it to understand how these people relate to you. The same goes for your own intentions and how they relate to others and to your own goals.

By definition, an intention is:

Noun

1. An act or instance of determining mentally upon some action or result.
2. The end or object intended; purpose.

Therefore, intentions are your goals in life, and your success in achieving them depends on how much you believe in your intention and whether achieving it outweighs the benefits of not achieving it.

For example, there is no point in me having an intention to win an Olympic medal in snow skiing, because I don't see any benefit of me doing so. I don't overly enjoy it so I don't want to put the time and effort into it, resulting in the lack of motivation to start it. Therefore, I find there are more benefits to not attempt it like saving time, and money.

However, if I set my intention to win a gold medal in TKD World Champs the chances have improved for the simple reason that; I do want that, I enjoy the sport which motivates me to do it and therefore more willing to put the money, time and effort into it. Hence the reason I won Bronze at the last World Cup.

The same goes for anything you try to achieve. If it comes from a place of passion and purpose the chances are much greater for you to achieve it.

You can apply intentions by making an Intention List by writing down all your goals for the next 12 months. It has been proven that if you write down your goals you are much more likely to achieve them than if you don't.

Focus

Without focus you will not achieve anything that you set out to do. I learnt this through board breaking. Try breaking a board without focus! I think we are all aware of how a lack of focus on the line of a polar board will break your hand or foot, before it breaks the board. The same is true for success. To be successful at anything, you need to focus all your time, energy and resources at it until you achieve it. Bruce Lee lived and breathed martial arts. While he ate foods that fueled his body, he would read about body mechanics or martial arts while also stretching

and doing fist clenches. The point here is that his focus was mentally, physically and energetically 100% of the time aimed towards what he wanted to **be, do and have**. Which is why he achieved it!

We have all heard that women are great at multitasking and I prided myself on being a master at this. However, when your focus is going in too many directions you never complete any of the tasks to the quality level that you would, if you only focused on one task at a time. Being a freelancer for many years I would work and train in many different activities, but it was when I stopped and focused my attention on one or two things (world champs and acting / stunts) that I really started to make progress towards my goals.

Just like TKD, acting helped me train my focus because you have to be present and in the moment with your fellow actor so that you can connect and respond appropriately to the truth of the situation. When you achieve this you tend to let go of everything else that is going on around you and the lines or behavior come out more naturally.

I realised that you need to control your focus in the short-term and the long-term. One of the best ways to bring yourself to focus on the present moment is by deep breathing into the pit of your stomach. We are never taught to breath properly and tend to breath into our chest, especially when we are stressed. Therefore to change your thoughts and your emotions in the short-term focus on deep breathing.

Focus also needs to be applied on the long-term as everything worth achieving takes time. One of the best ways to do this is to write your goal and the steps that you can take to work towards it. If you really want what you want, then it won't take much effort to do one thing everyday to achieve it.

Take risks

Taking a risk means not knowing whether your attempt at a goal will be a success or a failure, but it is the one attribute that all successful entrepreneurs have in common. If you never risk anything, then you never move out of your comfort zone and therefore never achieve. People tend to not take a risk for two reasons, for 1) fear of failure or 2) fear of success. Seems odd to say that someone could be fearful of success, but if it means that you could loose friends, people treat you differently, or you loose your private life then there is cause to play it safe.

As an actor you are always taking risks because standing up in front of an audience or a room full of production people and bearing your emotions and ideas to the world is very vulnerable. Rosalind Russell said that it was like "Standing naked and turning around very slowly". Every audition for an actor is a risk, as you never necessarily know what you may be asked to do, or what direction the casting director will give you. Every time you are risking your confidence, self-esteem and reputation, which as an actor is sometimes all you have. As an actor its up to you to

try something new so that your memorable and different from other actors reading the same lines going for the same job.

I see this as the same for martial artists. Stepping into a ring is a risk, as sometimes you don't know how good the other practitioner is in relation to you. Going from one board to breaking two boards is a risk, especially if you have never done it before. The same with performing on the world stage at World Champs and showing everyone your abilities is a risk.

When we take risks, we often come across mistakes or what we term 'failures'. Successful actors, martial artists and anyone that has made it to the top of their career failed at some time.

Actors go from rejection to rejection to rejection before landing a role. I think I would of auditioned at least 200 times before actually landing my first televised role and this is not uncommon within my acting peers. The same is true for most TKD competitors, as only one or two have had continued winning streaks!

What separates successful people from unsuccessful people comes down to their difference in attitude. If you take a risk and fail your ability to get up and try again and realise mistakes are all part of the process is paramount. Your ability to try and try again despite failures, show another tenant of TKD – indomitable spirit. Thomas Edison had 999 attempts before he created what we now know as the light bulb. Each time he made a mistake, he worked out what didn't work so that he could find, what did work.

Emotional Control

Most of us are not in control of our emotions. If we were we would all be happy! All of the time! Id love to say I have mastered this, however everything is a work in progress. But I have overcome the first step, which is having the awareness of how you are feeling at any point in time. You cannot change something if your not aware of it. Once you are aware of your feelings, you can acknowledge their presence and change them through your thoughts. Thoughts create your emotions and emotions drive your thoughts, they are connected.

As actors we need to be able to control our emotions so that they are always there ready to be used as they are our 'tool box'. Each script requires a different emotional base. As an actor you need to know how to draw that emotion out of yourself at the required time but more importantly, let it go when the scene is finished. Before actors go into a scene we do what is called 'emotional preparation'. How to go about this is different for each performer, but one way to do this is based on Misner acting technique. Before a scene you imagine and recall a time in your personal life where you had the same underlying emotion, then you build on this by imagining an "As IF" scenario.

For example: If the scene was about my husband dying, the emotion of the scene maybe sadness. Therefore I would imagine someone close to me dying that would

bring about this emotion. When I feel the emotion I would start the scene. This is a pretty basic example but I am sure you can get the idea.

Because music creates images in our minds eye and therefore thoughts, music can affect us emotionally and can also be used as a tool to create the desired emotional state.

Acting taught me about emotional control but TKD allowed me to practice it in the real world and showed me that it is a necessary component to add to any goal. Before you go into a competition, you need to make sure that you can control your emotions so that you are in the 'ideal state' to perform in. I found that when training specialty technique. If I didn't have an excited playful energy in my stomach (our energetic power center) I wouldn't be able to jump high enough. I also found that in sparring you wont be very successful if you go in angry, because anger is known to cause you to loose control. When you loose control you also loose your ability to be focused and in the moment to respond appropriately to your opponent. This happened to me in my first sparring match when I punched my opponent in the face. I literally saw her eyes turn black as anger set in. Her coach must have also noticed this because I heard him yell, "Don't get angry". After that, the match was easy as she was not in control of what she was doing and I won.

I feel the ideal emotions for sparring is a combination of confidence, calmness and yet an element of fear. Confidence to trust in your ability to win, calmness so that you can be focused on the game and see all that is going on, and yet a little bit of fear so that you don't become complacent but willing to fight.

The same is true in patterns. You cant be overtly nervous because we all know that nervousness can cause shaking, and in an event that requires you to show balance, slow motion and power, any sort of wobbling, may cause you to become off balance and hence loose points and the overall match.

I find that the acting technique of 'As If' scenarios could work well for Taekwon-Do to produce the desired emotion that you require and see emotional control as an element of the TKD tenant 'Self Control'.

Practice

We all know the saying "practice makes perfect" because a desire or goal cannot be achieved through wishful thinking and visualising alone, and requires effort to bring ideas into reality. My acting coach would always say that, "success comes when preparation and opportunity meet". I don't know any actor who doesn't need to practice their lines over and over to make sure they know them so well the words becomes a part of their body, and hence said with such conviction that we believe them to be theirs. The same goes with Taekwon-Do and learning patterns. We all know what happens if you forget your patterns in a competition, through lack of practice you get zero and loose the match.

The preparation of lines, or patterns, or any goal, requires patience, energy and perseverance (another tenant of TKD). Since General Choi practiced them every day I am sure he was also aware of this.

The other end of practice is the ability to trust and have faith that what you have done to prepare is enough. Once you have moved from the preparation and rehearsal stages and its performance time, you need to then let everything go, relax and have fun. Its like board breaking....let it all go. You've done it before, you know what you need to do and where your foot or hand needs to go, now you just need to trust that the body also knows this. This is where practice takes us so that we don't need to think anymore we just DO! Let go and have fun.

Funnily enough this is also the recipe for creating a successful life. Do all that you can do – set intentions, take action towards it, then let go and trust that everything else will fall into place.

Integrity

Integrity is something that gets thrown around and yet ask people what it means, they will probably um and arr before coming up with an answer. In acting terms, to have integrity is to “Say what you mean and mean what you say”.

This is a lesson that I found to be very powerful in daily life. How many times have you had a conversation with someone where they “beated around the bush” with what they wanted to say, or they used passive aggressive means to get a point across. When this happens to me I feel like saying, “get to the point” or “Say what you really mean”.

Another term we often here is to “speak your truth”. If someone annoys you its ok to tell them “I feel annoyed”. There is no point saying that what they did was ok and then walk away from the situation and complain about it to someone else. This only causes you to become bitter and twisted about it and passes that negative energy onto others. Although, I am sure we have all done this at some point. The wonderful thing about acting is that we can say what we want, when in real day-to-day life we would probably never say some of the things written in the script. Some call this actors therapy, since you get to work through some of the emotions that you wouldn't do in real life. This is also the reason we love movies and TV shows, because we are able to relate to what happens to the characters in some way and their experiences reflect what we can resonate with.

Taekwon-Do and martial arts in general are referred to, as not only a sport but a way of life. Integrity is therefore considered one of the tenants and for good reason. We all value someone more when they do what they say they are going to do. For example, you sign up for a course, having integrity means paying for the course. Or if you said you would help someone learn a break then follow through and teach them. I say to budding teachers, if you make a promise to your class make sure you follow through because kids will always remember when you have promised something great. Wouldn't you? When you don't follow through with integrity two things happen, people loose trust in you and you loose trust in you.

If you say your going to build a business successful people build the business. I don't need to spell out the opposite of that. But in order to follow through and achieve

your goals you need to incorporate all other key attributes listed above with integrity.

Play

Do you notice how kids are always having fun with an activity and when they aren't they don't want to do it anymore. That's what I love about kids they are naturally and instinctively drawn to what they enjoy. Acting is fun! If it weren't there wouldn't be cues of people all vying for the same role in the waiting room of casting studios. Some how it seems wrong to be paid so much money to do something that is fun but that's the value we place on entertainment. The same goes for competitive sports. We pay our national players a lot of money just to do what we enjoy to do on our weekends and days off.

Actors have to have fun because when we have fun we tend to let go of all our worries and concerns of the outcome. It relaxes us, allows our bodies to take over and do what they need to do to succeed. When things aren't fun we tend to go into avoidance behavior and procrastinate and fail to do the things necessary (learn the lines, learn the patterns, continue to practice and so on) to achieve the goal (land the role, get the gold medal, build the business and earn the money).

For me personally, I remember when I was in the Do Jung and we had to do a jump over someone's belt (which I now realize was preparation for special technique). The idea was that if you made the height it would go higher. At the time I thought "sweet this is fun" and I got it easy. Well I gave it a go and it didn't turn out so bad. But then the second time and the times after that I began thinking about it and analyzing it trying to make it better. But for some reason the jump wasn't as good. I have realized that this is also the case with my patterns or sparring. Once I learn the required movements and practice, I need to let all of this go, believe in myself and my ability, and then go out there and have fun with it, because if I'm enjoying it then everyone else will enjoy watching it.

Belief

"If your mind can conceive it, and your heart believe it, then you can achieve it"

Mohammed Ali

The crazy thing about the key attributes needed to achieve success is that ultimately, if you don't have the belief that you can have your desired goal, then you will never have it. Full Stop. We develop most of our underlying beliefs about ourselves, and the world within the first two years of our life, which are taught to us by our caregivers. If your parents struggled with money then you may have a belief that you will never have enough or that you have to work hard for little reward. If your parents were victims or bullies we may also acquire the belief that we need to be treated badly or treat others badly to get what we want.

Do you really believe you can win 14 million dollars in the next lottery draw? If your first reaction was no, then that's your underlying belief, no you won't. Questions like this can easily test what your underlying beliefs are. The great thing is that you can change them but you have to be willing to be self-aware of your thoughts, feelings and emotions in response to situations to find out what they are, and also be willing to change them.

Conclusion

“Change doesn't happen overnight. There's no button that's pushed to magically alter everything. Change happens little by little. Day by day. Hour by hour.

— J.M. Darhower, *Monster in His Eyes*

In conclusion, there will be those that read this and say –

“Who are you to talk us about success! You're not a billionaire, with the best house on the best street, with an Oscar in hand and a TKD gold medal around your neck.

To which I would reply -

“Yet!”.

To achieve my master's degree it took me 6.5 years of university study, \$35,000 of a student loan not to mention the years of high school study and volunteer work to increase my knowledge. To get to where I am with acting and stunts took me 9 years and to get to my third black belt in TKD took me 7 years. So drawing on what we have discussed any goal worth achieving in life is a process and takes time. On top of all that, it also comes down to your definition of success. For me I have achieved some of the goals I set out to by applying the process and practicing the key attributes which include but are not limited to; a career that I love, increasing my earning potential, getting distinction for my 2nd Dan grading, and winning a bronze medal at World Cup. If you want to place value on all the out worldly items that you can measure in my life then go ahead. But I value more who I have become as a person and my ability to practice and harness these skills so that when I get to the last stop on the tracks, I can say, “I mastered myself”.

It is therefore the development of these traits that have allowed me to be successful in my development of self, whether witnessed externally by others (Taekwon-) or internally by me (Do).

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