



The Roundhouse: Headlines from Around the Do-jang.

As astute apprentices, you know that Taekwon-Do seeks to improve a person physically, mentally and spiritually. The process of strengthening your mind by overcoming mental obstacles is the topic we would like to discuss in this issue of The Roundhouse.

"Obstacles are those frightful things you see when you take your eyes off your goals."

-- Henry Ford

Whether it's performing a 45-degree spinning hook kick or a jumping 360, we all face obstacles that pose a frustrating degree of difficulty during our practice of Taekwon-Do. How you mentally approach these physical obstacles determines if you will successfully overcome them.

So, you say, if performing a perfectly executed jumping/spinning sidekick is not the goal then, "What is it?" As Mr. Bailey says, "We don't expect perfection. Just perfect effort." Our goal as Taekwon-Do students is to "become an honorable person with perfect character and physical condition." Whether you've been studying for one month or 10 years, the ideal Taekwon-Do student is always learning, trying, failing, and succeeding -- all while maintaining their sense of humor and humility.

"I don't believe in failure. It is not failure if you enjoyed the process."

-- Oprah Winfrey

First, you need to get into the right frame of mind by looking at obstacles as "fun challenges." Let's say you've sailed through your colored belts with ease and are now suddenly facing difficulty breaking at the brown belt level. Your confidence is shaken and you wonder what you're doing wrong? The answer is, "Nothing!" You're simply going through what many brown belts go through: a period of self-doubt caused by the impending date of your black belt test and the increasing pressure and expectations you are putting on yourself. Steeling one's mental fortitude is never more important than as one prepares for his or her 1st Dan black belt test.

"Men [and women] succeed when they realize that their failures are the preparation for their victories."

-- Ralph Waldo Emerson

You've readjusted your distance, slowed down your approach, speeded up your kick, raised your knee, aimed your hip -- yet you're still bouncing off the boards instead of blasting through them. Now what? Perhaps the solution is to "Try softer." In other words, stop overanalyzing every aspect of your break and get into the state of mind the Japanese call "mushin" (which literally means "no mind"). The conscious effort of trying too hard actually works against you by interrupting your flow and blocking the mind. A better approach may be to take a deep breath, relax, and even walk away from the boards. Chances are in a few days you'll come back with a fresh perspective and a successful break on the first try. And if not on the first try, then the second, the third, or the one-hundredth try. Remember: It's not a failure if you gained something of value from the experience.

"It takes as much courage to have tried and failed as it does to have tried and succeeded."

-- Anne Morrow Lindbergh

As a 1st Dan candidate, I was having trouble breaking the required four boards at my black belt test. I could kick through those same four boards no problem at the Do-jang, but I continued to fail at Edmonds, time and again. After each "delay" (as my promotion papers called it), I picked myself up, dusted myself off, and prepared myself mentally and physically for the next test. Perseverance paid off when I finally broke through that obstacle and passed my black belt test. Years later, I was able to offer words of empathy and compassion to another 1st Dan candidate who was going through the exact same experience. She, too, persevered and eventually passed her black belt test with flying colors! Perhaps your temporary setbacks will give you the opportunity to help another student overcome their obstacles. Improving your mental attitude can change your whole outlook. So don't worry about the destination. Focus on your journey and enjoy the ride!