

Advancing Successfully

Only the individual practitioner can decide if a 95% success rate is, for his tastes, too much to ask and if 85% is too little. Estimations like this are what account for the difference in quality between styles and schools.

Have you ever noticed that some advanced karate-ka look down upon arts that do not finish the opponent convincingly and within a fraction of a second? Many well-seasoned karate enthusiasts have become so good at doing basic movements quickly and with laudable power that they feel any other approach is unnecessary and may be even counterproductive.

They see self-defense as a knockdown drag-out fight and know that the quickest way to end such a melee is to knock the guy down and leave before the cops drag them both out. They have little patience for kata interpretation, wrist releases, throws that turn one's back to the bad-guy, subtle off-balancing, or minimal motion techniques. They may appreciate these items the way you might appreciate the gymnastic ability of a Wu-shu practitioner without simultaneously thinking of it as practical self-defense.

They feel that subtle "advanced" budo is effete and, in application, will inevitably fall short of a 95% success rate. They feel that if one invests time in changing one's fast and hard reactions to soft and relaxed, one will be doomed to train several additional decades in order to make these new reactions function in a real fight. Having achieved what they feel are the skills that would kick butt 95% of the time, they would rather hone those skills so that, as they age, they can still kick butt 90%, then 85% of the time as the years add up. To them, continued hard and fast training is a wiser investment than learning how to work with internal energy or how to calmly arrest and control an assailant to that he can face a jury with all his teeth.

As they advance in age, they want to feel that they are loosing a level of successful execution *slowly*. One cannot, after all, expect to get better after a certain age, can one? Well, yes and no. Since the hard and fast karate-ka has a smaller set of skills to maintain and since these skills are easier to merge with his natural reactions, his learning new concepts is limited and his training becomes an attempt to maintain the prowess he attained when he was, say, 45 years old. His practice is very physical, so gradually his body will feel the strain of the workout such that, although he is in great shape for his age, he will not be physically superior to the younger students he outranks. He feels however that he will be physically superior to non-karate-ka who took the minimal motion, soft and fluid, or internal route, and certainly superior to the untrained assailant (unless that assailant is young and strong).

Perhaps he is correct in his assessment. However, I would ask the advanced karate-ka faced with the lightening lunge of the 23-year-old *sandan* if he would like to learn a few tips that

would make his *ippon kumite* or his self-defense responses just a little bit trickier and appear just a little quicker, while using less energy. If so, that means he wants not only to train his body, but also to teach his mind (a mind that doesn't seem to age as quickly).

And what do you think aiki, t'ai-chi, and "softer" martial artists have been doing while Mr. Fast-and-Hard was advancing successfully in his art? They have been, as CHEN Man-ching suggested, "investing in weakness". This often means they have been investing in "failure". They have been falling seven times to rise up eight so that the ninth time, they cannot even be off-balanced.

Even the advanced karate-ka can't look down upon those who don't fall.