

Ignoring the Goal

We ignore the forest for the trees.

I believe my students appreciate the minute details that I often give them in class. They know that in a real self-defense situation, refined points will be overlooked, but they understand that those fine points (and the corrections that bring them into reality) are the very things that can make the difference between a successful and unsuccessful technique.

Often a student, imagining himself in a true confrontation, will slur through the details of a technique and unconsciously use excess speed and strength. His mind is so focused on the goal of personal protection (and making the bad-guy pay), that the technique used is degraded to a semi-technical application of brute force. I then suggest that he take up bodybuilding and gain 50 pounds of muscle rather than training in an art. He gets the idea (since he's heard this correction a dozen times before) and puts his mind into performing the details precisely as I have described them.

Once students can, during technique training at least, suspend their fantasies about thrashing an MMA version of Boris Badinov, they can appreciate that those details really do make their technical execution both efficient and effective.

Great! Now everyone is on the same page and we are working on a subtle weight shift to support an adjustment of thumb position to make a fundamental wrist release slide free like the grease from Boris Badinov's hair. The wrist release leads to a counterstrike that leads to a takedown or throw, which sets up a finishing technique. Often we take this sequence of chained techniques apart in order to study the details of each segment. If your back shoulder is pulled to far away, you will not get sufficient power in your strike. If it is not pulled away at all, it will also be weak. Okay, let's do a drill that tests the power of this counter strike from various body angles.

Drill now completed, proper angle now discovered, we return to the wrist release and counterstrike combination. The requirement for exam, however, is only the release and, separately, a takedown as a follow up. Eager for their next promotion, the students are diligent about concentrating on the details of these requirements. When the exam comes, they pass with flying colors.

Now, back in class, we are working on yet another refinement or a refinement of an already taught refinement. I see students shake their heads in amazement at how detailed the instruction of a simple technique can be, a technique they already have supposedly mastered sufficiently to pass an exam. With their training in class and their personal practice to bolster them, they have no problem executing either the previously required escape or the previously

required takedown, *but they cannot string together the combination of techniques that actually might be applied in a real-life confrontation.* They have become, through no fault of their own, excellent students of the martial arts without having become excellent martial artists. Why? It is because, **in an attempt to make them efficient and effective, as their instructor, I have made them nearsighted.** To use a baseball analogy: they kept their eye on the ball so that they could hit the pitch, but did not see that a hitting a grounder to second would produce a double play, instead of advancing the runner.

They see the means by which self-defense is achieved, but not the wider goal. Obviously my goal, as a teacher, should be to make them see the forest, not the trees.

More Trees and Forests next time.