

Heroes, Ideals, Motivations

We all have had our heroes and we all have set ideals for ourselves. They serve as motivations that help us advance on the path toward success, whether that is in martial arts, in making a living, or in designing a life. Our ideals can be pure, but our heroes are often flawed. Perhaps that is because our heroes set ideals for themselves and, along their path, found that occasionally capitulating to expediency was more profitable in the short run than maintaining their ideals for the long run.

I watch *The Fountainhead* (the 1949 movie with Gary Cooper and Patricia Neal) every few years. Despite its screen adaptation that rolls out a 695-page novel in under two hours (a very difficult thing to do), and despite sections that seem inconceivable in today's world, its message is valuable, rings true to me personally, and sadly, is beginning to seem more inconceivable than the movie's most compressed plot advancement or unlikely scene. That message is that human beings, being free, have the right to live for themselves if they do so with integrity, i.e. demanding nothing from others except what is contracted for. Today, living for oneself seems the definition of *lost* integrity.

I am not turning this blog into a political treatise, but I do think that older values like integrity and heroism have much to do with today's *budo*. I have written directly and indirectly about this in other articles and in [The Road to Mastery](#). In this essay, I would like to consider heroism and integrity from a self-evaluation point of view.

Did you respect your art enough to stay with it during the times when business models said you would make more money if you would just appeal to the current craze? (I lived through the kung-fu craze, the ninja craze, the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle craze, the Mighty Morphin Power Ranger craze, the kiddy summer camp craze, the kick-boxing craze, and even the MMA craze, never changing the title of what I taught nor offering classes in anything that I wasn't qualified to teach, or that smelled like a fad.)

If your ideal was to get rich running a martial arts school and your hero was some moderately talented martial artist who knew business skills really well, then perhaps your art wasn't so important. But to many of us who see the traditional Asian martial ways as contributors to the integrity of the students who learn them, treating our arts with integrity is as important as having a building built just as we designed it, as in *The Fountainhead*.

To have the courage not to capitulate to making money, if it means a loss of integrity, may not seem heroic to some. Those who view the market as simply a way to transfer funds from a buyer's to a seller's pocket really don't care about the integrity of their product, only its popularity. However, those of us who appreciate the market as a free exchange of values and feel

that the consumer should get at least equal value as the seller, those of us who put our values out there for those who wish to experience them (via classes, seminars, videos, etc.) often have to make sacrifices simply to stay afloat. I don't feel like a hero in the sense of a soldier who carries his buddy on his shoulders under fire, or an athlete who gives up a chance at the Olympics to take care of a sick parent. People look at those examples and say, "See? Self-sacrifice is heroism!" Not necessarily. There are some things to which you can sacrifice yourself without revealing any hint of heroism. But sacrifice certainly *seems* like heroism because **heroism is maintaining your values despite the pressure**. And frankly, I think that is reasonable and proud self-interest.

If you think you showed integrity because you kept true to your high standards despite the pressure to sacrifice yourself to expediency, you just might be the type of hero I am talking about.