

## Rational Grit

If martial arts schools take on the challenge of helping students improve themselves regardless of their innate capabilities (see *Triple Standards*), what must the student contribute to the process in order for him/her to succeed?

Logically, someone who is graced with natural abilities need not improve those abilities as much as those who do not initially have them. Many times, students enter a dojo wanting to improve in some area, but find a way to showcase their natural talents rather than improve what does not come naturally. They achieve rank and notoriety then fade away. Few of them choose to bear down, as those of lesser abilities have done, to improve the areas in which those natural gifts do not exist.

“Those of lesser abilities” have been bearing down from day one. Isn’t “bearing down” what the martial arts school asks from the student in order for the student to succeed?

I have already referenced this in my *Nature vs. Nurture* article. Grit often trumps Grace in the long run. But the title of this article is **Rational Grit**. Why the nuance? If grit is what a martial school expects from a successful student, doesn’t a student’s application of simple grit answer the lead question?

It does; but trying harder, staying with it, etc. is, in my humble opinion, often itself misunderstood. When I was but a youth, Jimmy from the *Mickey Mouse Club* would encourage the kiddie audience to have Stick-to-it-ivity, a phrase that has stuck with me for decades. Good advice, of course, since at that time the nation did not want to raise a crop of dilettantes during a time of concentrating brain power in the sciences to win The Space Race. Nowadays, the dominant advice is Do What You Love, in the realization that not doing what one loved had produced a generation of less-than-fulfilled, but financially well-off adults. Now wait a minute! Do we want people to retire happy at what they worked at but not financially well off? No. Do we want them to be financial well off but unhappy? No.

Okay, transfer those concepts to the martial arts. Do we want a person simply to achieve rank or win a trophy due to his/her physical gifts and then stop studying because, after all, they have achieved their goal? I think not. Do we want them to be gritty, stubborn, and work hard at the price of being happy while doing so? No, again.

Rational Grit, I suggest, is Stick-to-it-ivity at something that one appreciates as an *ongoing value*. Many years ago in my dojo, an enthusiastic middle-aged, no-so-coordinated man failed his *rokkyu* exam in karate. I explained, in detail, what could be improved in his kata and he went off to work at it. Unfortunately, he was not astute in proprioceptive awareness. He made the same mistakes on the next exam. Frustrated, he quit training, mumbling that for some reason (with no specifics offered), I was biased against his passing. One could easily criticize him for not having enough grit. One could certainly criticize him for reacting irrationally in his criticism of me. However, one might have also argued that he was being rational, albeit in an unconscious way. Inside, he probably knew that, at that time of his life, he could neither handle criticism nor recognize what it

took to correct the flaws that had been criticized. Since a martial arts class is laden with correction and positive criticism (at least one hopes it is positive), at that stage of his development, he would have been banging his head against reality hoping that someday the teacher would find him worthy. In other words, he might have eventually achieved, but at the price of being happy.

I would suggest that currently my students have one thing in common: they see their achievement in martial arts as worth both the criticism and also the constant effort they put in. They have made a rational decision to be gritty for the long haul.