

Job vs. Career

In the late 1960s, I was in Newtonville, MA accompanying a friend to the large Star Market that arches over the Massachusetts Turnpike. The checkout girl (she was probably a young 18) handled my friend's purchases quickly, efficiently (even though in those days there were no scanners and each item's price had to be punched into the cash register), and with a pleasant attitude. I praised her for her demeanor and said aloud that I wish I could give awards to workers that did their jobs as happily as she.

"Yeah, she's probably just saving bucks for college," said my friend.

"Maybe, but she works as if it were a really satisfying career."

Most checkout clerks of her age consider what they do a job, a way to make ends meet. Some are pleasant, engaged, and happy to be employed; some are counting the customers until their shift ends. Occasionally, people like this young woman, see their job as a career (even if they plan another career), a stepping stone to something greater, and are therefore more motivated to produce excellent work.

Many decades later, it occurred to me that my feeling of discomfort at the way certain head instructors ran their martial arts schools was related to that young checkout clerk. Some instructors seem to be clerks going through the motions; others are salesmen trying hard to make their job a career.

Almost every martial arts instructor opens a school because he feels that being a Sensei/Sabum/Sifu is something to which he aspires—a career in which work is likely to be fun. He feels that teaching martial arts as a profession would be as wonderful as an portrait artist might feel suddenly having a steady market for her work. Instead of laboring at the art she loves but having to work at Star Market to pay the bills, becoming a professional artist means she can work at her art without dissipating her energies. However, as soon as there are bills she can't pay or a purchase she can't afford, she will need to find a way to bolster her art sales so she doesn't have to work at Star Market again. Some martial arts instructors teach their art as a hobby, with no emphasis on either Job or Career, but many others teach their arts as a career—what they do for a living. As a result, they have to do whatever it takes to keep their career going. That might mean becoming a better instructor, opening a few non-martial arts classes, finding ways to enroll more students, or finding ways to extract more revenue from each existing student.

An example of a career-oriented head instructor was the late Sabum Nim Richard Byrne. Back in the early 1970s, ignorant of the difference between Tae-kwon-do and Tang-soo-do, I wrote Master Byrne for some details. There was no Internet back then, so to learn more I'd have to buy the only book available on the subject, if I could find a bookstore that sold martial arts books. Master Byrne not only returned an explanatory letter but also invited me to visit his *dojang* in Medford, an hour away. When I arrived, a black belt assistant escorted me in, presented me with a photo album to peruse, and asked if she could get me anything. After the class Master Byrne sat with me, answered all my questions and took some information from me in order to invite me to his invitational tournament. Over the years, I competed in several of his events, helped in a couple of his charity

demonstrations, and participated in a few seminars he sponsored. It was clear that he wanted to maximize his income and, having found a career that suited him, one he seemed suited for, he tried to do it in a professional way. Whether or not I agree with the ways he maximized his cash flow, I respect the fact that he was committed to teaching his martial art as a professional. He was doing it not as a job but as a career.

Having mentally made a distinction between a Job and a Career, I did not know quite where to place my own martial arts professionalism. Clearly, I was a career martial artist, but I found myself often refusing to do the very items that would boost my income. No fads, no fudging on the martial arts I taught, no special contracts or sales pitches. What kinds of career martial artist was I?

Next time: Career vs. Calling