

Career vs. Calling

Having mentally made a distinction between a Job and a Career, I did not know quite where to place myself. 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?

There is a certain strain of martial arts instructors who see their instructing as ascending above the Job/Career construct. Whether they are heads of a federation, chief instructors of large schools, or whether they teach out of their garage, they are dedicated not just to teaching for their own satisfaction, but also to improving their students' lives. In other words, the martial arts have served as a vehicle for a larger life purpose.

In a more antiquated phrase, they are found their "calling".

For some people careers and callings are the same thing, but I'd like to offer a distinction. To be successful in a **career**, your major emphasis is developing a vehicle that will not only make ends meet comfortably, but will also serve your clients. In exercising a **calling**, your major emphasis is to benefit your clients and hope to do so in a way (both financially and personally) that supports your life.

So, are callings always self-sacrificial? Gosh, I hope not. I think Westerners have been fed a line of morality that says Good equals benefits to others where Bad equals benefits to self. I believe this to be simplistic and dangerous to our own self-development. Who would want to develop oneself if it were a morally bad thing to do?

There are now spiritual, psychological, and even business programs that recognize that to benefit oneself, it may be necessary to benefit others, and that to benefit others, it is definitely necessary to benefit oneself.

Let's say you wanted to be the most talented karate kata analyzer on the planet. This would take a lot of personal work on various kata and a lot of time analyzing the movements you were perfecting. How would you then know if you were coming closer to your goal? Wouldn't you have to teach what you had developed and test your analyses, not only to see if they functioned as you expected, but also to see if you could transfer that knowledge to someone else, who could, in turn, apply it? You observe your students' ministrations with the material you have been working on and then make some adjustments to improve it. Even if your goal is initially self-interested, you must indirectly benefit someone else in order to achieve it.

Conversely, if your goal were to make students superb at converting their traditional karate to practical self-defense, you would have to first know how to do it yourself. Without you as an excellent example, it is unlikely they would work at learning the kata and *bunkai* that would make them improve. Even if your goal is initially other-oriented, you must benefit yourself to accomplish it.

I chose teaching as a profession because I enjoy doing it, I learn a lot while preparing to do it, I benefit others by doing it, and if I play my cards right, I can actually earn a living doing it. When I gave up academic teaching in order to concentrate on teaching budo, I was able to add additional benefits: physical training, no assignments to correct, and the freedom to be my own administration department.

Oh yes, and then there were the incredibly generous employment perks and humongous paychecks. Okay, so sometimes Careers out-benefit Callings; but Careers seldom out-satisfy Callings, and satisfaction, although never guaranteed, is only a few degrees south of contentment, something a job and often a career rarely bring.