

It's All Good

Acceptance, Tolerance, and Standards

It has become a frequently heard saying from those who do not want stress in their lives or who do not want us to stress over the little things in life: “It’s all good” implies “even if it doesn’t initially *feel* good, it is really not so bad—don’t make a big deal about it”, or “even if it doesn’t initially *feel* good *now*, you’ll recover quickly—you can handle it”, or “even if it doesn’t initially *feel* good, there just may be a hidden silver lining in the apparently dark cloud”. Personally, I like the idea of trying to find the good side of things. I can use more of that attitude at times. Seeing the good side of a fender-bender is a psychologically healthy thing to do so long as we know we shouldn’t *try* to get into an auto-accident just because the insurance payment might help us buy a new car.

It is wise, I think, to accept the things we cannot control, tolerate some things that we might be able to control but the controlling of which would not be worth the effort, and go on about our business with a generally positive attitude. There is, however, a hidden slippery slope that I think we should consider whenever we are tempted to say, “It’s all good.”

Sometimes when I visit a martial arts conference, I am impressed with the skill and knowledge of a certain instructor—sometimes several instructors. I prefer one art or one approach above another, but I can clearly see that certain of the guest instructors, regardless of art, really know their stuff and I applaud them. Most of the other instructors are competent, albeit at a somewhat lower level since they often have less experience, but that is to be expected. Not everyone can suddenly have 4+ decades of training under one’s belt. The spirit of these conferences/seminars is to foster mutual respect on a cross-platform basis. Harder arts get to appreciate softer arts, Chinese arts get to appreciate Indonesian arts, sport arts get to appreciate combat arts, etc. So the implied theme is “It’s all good!” But then there are the one or two instructors in American Combat Bō-di-o-do or Beikoku Ryukyu Ninpo-ryu Kan Do who, despite their prominently displayed red felt stripes on their extra-wide black belts, are simply embarrassments both to their ranks and to their presumed traditions.

I have had green belt students ask me why the black belts of Donnie Masters’s Masters of Disaster Mudo Dojang cannot block with stability nor punch with power. Since I do not like to denigrate any school in front of my students in order to contribute to a professional respect among schools, I say, “Different arts and styles have different standards.”

“But, Sensei, I have seen white belts who are better than...”

“Maybe they are better at other things we haven’t even studied.”

This usually shuts down the complaint, but I know these intermediate students, eager to improve their skills, will remember the experience of running into students of other arts that were not just different but also “less than all good”.

Since the marketplace of martial arts is open and free, we all have to tolerate and even accept these additions to the martial arts panoply, however we do not have to accept their standards. When it comes to standards, I would argue that, “It’s never good enough” works better to incite improvement than “It’s all good.”

I do not think I am alone in having to take a deep breath or two when the “It’s all good” attitude undercuts the quality of martial arts. Luckily, I can nod, smile, and say, “It’s all good” meaning “even if it doesn’t initially *appear* good, I don’t have to accept it, so I won’t make a big deal about it”.