

Non-deliberate Performance

As important as deliberate practice is, it can get in the way of one's success. Ed Parker often referred to this as "Paralysis by Analysis".

As my last article suggested, I am strongly in favor of students practicing mindfully and deliberately, using their brains as well as their bodies to enhance their understanding of techniques and their martial art as a whole. However, when performing a technique either for an engagement drill such as *ippon kumite* or partner practice as in aiki and ju-jitsu arts, one needs to let one's body take over and do the technique unmindfully, especially if one is being reviewed or instructed by Sensei.

If you are constantly aware of every detail of your technique or kata, it will not flow. If it does not flow, it is unlikely to work as it was intended. Sure, that means you will get extra instruction from Sensei to help you out, but it will never seem to be enough instruction because Sensei's corrections simply add to the list of items of which you have to be conscious. Your performance then becomes more deliberate and, frankly, worse.

Self-conscious practice is not the same as deliberate practice. Deliberate practice is *conscious* rather than self-conscious practice.

A truly un-self-conscious performance does not necessarily result in a good performance, however. We've all seen embarrassing performances that had a marked absence of self-consciousness. I remember witnessing an aiki demo in which the teacher, confident in his knowledge and without much of a self-awareness filter, claimed that he was applying "ki" as he was executing his technique. I would call it force, but he un-self-consciously labeled it in a way that made every spectator repress a wretch. Worse, the ki-powered technique did not work very well.

A non-deliberate performance, the way I mean it, is a performance of a kata or waza that depends on one's earlier deliberate practice, but allows one's body the freedom to show the fruits of that practice, whether or not it appears perfect. A performance that *looks like* deliberate practice demonstrates only that the performer does not know the difference between training and application. Picture a football tight end that does not know the difference between *studying* how to split the defensive safeties as he runs a post-pattern and actually running the pattern against real defenders. If, during a game, or even a scrimmage, Mr. Tight End stops in midfield and yells for his quarterback's opinion about zigzagging vs. delivering a head-fake, you'd scream and expect the coach to bench him for the season while he undergoes psychotherapy. The time to ask the QB is when he is walking through the play during the first iteration or two. The time to ask more experienced players who know the opposition players is in the locker room a week before the game. That sort of attention to detail is appropriate when the detail must be *performed* rather than *practiced*, and performed non-deliberately.

Some people learn by repeating a whole technique, gradually feeling for the changes they need to make it function better. Others need to hear a description of what they need to do. Still others need to see the technique done perfectly a number of times. Occasionally, you may discover a student that needs the technique

done to him! Then there are those who need multiple mode reinforcement, that is, they need to both see and feel the technique as they do it. Some cannot learn well from a solo form and must have a human being in front of them. Others need to do the solo form a thousand times before they are comfortable having an opponent in front of them. Even so, meticulous, deliberate training in the mode that works best for them will help them be ready to execute the technique.

“To execute” literally means, “to carry out the intention”. It does not mean to figure out how.