

Maintenance Scheduling

There is an old bodybuilding aphorism that goes something like, “to own it, you have to earn it.” Obviously this means that if you want a more muscular body, you have to do the work that brings about that result. The phrase does not mention, of course, that you really don’t *own* it; rather you *rent* it. The rental cost is your regular maintenance workouts. If one could earn it and then truly own it, Arnold Schwarzenegger would still look like Conan, The Barbarian.

The same is true of martial art skills. It is very difficult, even with a strict workout schedule, to retain your speed and flexibility from the age twenty to age sixty. But, imagine how slow and un-flexible you would now be if you had not maintained your training.

Ironically, training in martial arts is a rent-to-own proposition. You put in the work to learn and earn your basics and then put in regular work to maintain them, but if you train under a good teacher with a well-developed curriculum, you also keep learning more, giving you more to maintain. If your teacher keeps repeating the same lessons after you have achieved *yudansha* (upper back belt) status, it may be time to become a *ronin* and seek other outlets to add to your knowledge. Having less to maintain is not exactly a good thing.

If we are to keep the self-development aspect of martial arts study enriching our lives, we must both maintain and gain. Sure, it is a little like bodybuilding, but it is even more like achieving notoriety in academia. Attaining new knowledge is as important as maintaining old skills—at least the old skills that are still relevant. Should you also wish to become a teacher of the traditional martial arts, you may need to maintain those skills that are no longer relevant to you but are definitely relevant to the level of student you are teaching. Whew! That’s a lot of work!

It reminds me of my waning language skills. I was once able to converse in German and French and at least ask for the restroom in Japanese. But I live in the USA where neither German nor French, and certainly not Japanese, is spoken regularly in my area. So, if I do not travel to Europe regularly—with a side trip to Japan—it will be increasingly difficult to maintain my foreign language conversational skills. And even if I were able to visit Europe more often, it is increasingly likely that I’ll run into English-speaking Europeans. Language maintenance is quite the challenge.

In martial arts, I “speak” boxing, wrestling, Judo, Aiki-ju-jutsu, and Karate. I have put boxing, wrestling, and Judo aside to narrow my concentration on the other two martial arts. As I improve in the way I have always intended to improve (making my application of skills less effortful and more natural), keeping up the big breakfalls and athletic throws of aiki and the high kicks and power charges of karate has become more challenging, not only for physical reasons,

but also for reasons of time. That is, if I spend time maintaining my flexible competition kicks, I'll have less time to improve my subtle application of self-defense receptions and counters. If I spend time maintaining my low entries to big hip throws, I'll have less time to improve my minimal motion and internal aiki skills.

And yet I manage to do a pretty good job of imitating myself as a fresh *mudansha* (black belt holder) in both arts, as well as being able to teach novices and advanced black belts alike.

I will reveal my super secret training secrets (that are super as well as superior and superb) next time. By the way, you may have already learned them.