

StickToIt-ivity

(The inspiration from this article came from Canadian correspondent Steve Nazar.)

My essays concerning [Woods's Top 16 Reasons Why Students Stop Attending](#) did not discuss the reasons why students *continue* to train as if it were a vocation. There is, as you can imagine, no easy single answer. The reasons may go back to my early essays on what motivates people to seek traditional martial arts in the first place (see [Sunday with Sensei's Journal, Vol. 1: Welcome to the Dojo](#)): self-defense, self-development, sport, interest in Asian culture.

Still, even given the initial motivation, its survival and durability is a mystery. And, of course, since the way is long, motivations change along the way.

When I was a kid in front of the living room's console black-and-white TV, watching *The Mickey Mouse Club*, the host, Jimmie Dodd used to encourage us l'il uns with a song (or was it a story?) about persistence—he called it “StickToIt-iveness” (or was it “StickToIt-ivity”?). Before kids' attention spans became shorter than a hiccup, we sat un-dissuaded for an hour, while the entertainment and education flowed. Ironically, we had youthful stick-to-it-ivity because we enjoyed the program, we were learning, and because we had not been over-stimulated to change subjects and bombarded with this, that, and the other thing from, on one side, mom's telling us to finish breakfast, asking us about homework, and making sure we had a dime in our pocket and all our school supplies, to, on the other side, avoiding Dumpy Dan, the school-bus bully while trying to keep our books from being dumped by his lieutenant while trying to set a recess date to play tag with both Rapidly Running Rita and her sometime girlfriend Lightning-legged Laurie, while making sure that we, in fact, had both remembered our lunch, and insured that it had not been sat upon by Dumpy Dan, and company.

Growing up, we gradually took responsibility not only for what would occupy our leisure time, but also what activities would benefit us. Would it help us financially or spiritually to take instruction in oil painting, ballroom dancing, or, say, those Asian (in those days the comics would have said “oriental”) martial arts? We were armed with not only the ability to stick-to-it, but also the disposition that now, as adults, we would not be compelled to stick to anything we did not like. As long as we benefited from the instruction, as long as it didn't interfere with our job or family, and as long as it was fun, we would continue. Even in budo, we would be, after all *okyaku-san* (honorable customers) rather than *deshi* (disciples) or simply *montei* (students). The transference from customer to student to disciple is, I believe, how the Stick-to-it-ivity develops. So, one must ask, what makes that transition happen?

As customers, we pay the fee and get what we paid for. We'll come back again if we want to, or go somewhere else if we feel like it. As students, we return to the same place to learn

as a matter of habit. But as disciples, we have decided that the habit of being a student not only does not interfere with our job and family, but also enhances our work and domestic life, and that it continues to be both educative and fun.

The nature of what we learn and the nature of the fun we have may change, but just when we think it is getting habitual and predictable, there is a new wrinkle, a new detail, a new challenge, all of which never ceases to award that well-developed sense of Stick-to-it-ivity we started with a few (or more than a few) years before.