

The Black Belt Book of Life - Topic #23

Maximize The Minimum

To not get drained and tired,
and not be madly dumb,
in all things great and small
we must *Maximum the Minimum*.

There can be economy only where there is efficiency.

Benjamin Disraeli

[British Prime Minister-19th Century]

*The highest type of efficiency is that which can
utilize existing material to the best advantage.*

Jawaharlal Nehru

[Prime Minister of India - 20th Century]

*There are only two qualities in the world:
efficiency and inefficiency, and only two sorts
of people: the efficient and the inefficient.*

George Bernard Shaw

For any task, especially that of fighting or performing, we only have so much gas in the tank, and our success will be determined by how we manage the fuel, the energy in our tank. Therefore, to optimize the potential of success, we must *Maximize the Minimum*.

In order to function properly the body needs nutrition. With the extraordinary energy levels associated with any physically demanding performance, especially fighting, what is the number one nutrient the body needs to sustain itself and insure success? Carbohydrates? Protein? Water?

Don't know? The answer is oxygen. More than any other nutritional element, people involved in physically demanding activities need oxygen. Yes, of course it is also the number one element needed to sustain life, but it is critical to an athlete, especially a martial artist/fighter whose well-being depends on his skills of combat; skills which, if deactivated due to a lack of oxygen, can have disastrous results. Therefore, when engaging in strenuous exercise or combat, we must be able to maximize the minimum amount of oxygen we have. If we run out too soon, it's curtains.

Arguably, the number one impediment to maximizing the minimum amount of oxygen usage in the body is tension. Why? Because tension — both mental and physical — burns up oxygen at an enormous rate. Without exception, a beginning fighter will burn out in a few minutes of combat whereas a well-trained fighter will last ten times longer. The difference between the novice and the expert fighter is that the expert has learned how to manage his energy expenditure; in effect, *maximizing the minimum*.

The question then arises, "How do we manage tension?" We manage tension through relaxation. Okay, so the next question is, "How do we manage relaxation?" We manage relaxation in two primary ways: 1. mind control, and 2. technical expertise.

When analyzed, we realize that much tension is directly linked to our mind and its processes. For example, a baseball, tennis or golf coach may say to a player, "Hit the ball harder." A soccer coach may say to his player, "Kick the ball harder." A novice martial arts teacher may say to his pupil, "Hit the target harder." For most beginners the reaction to hitting, kicking or punching the ball or target harder equates to tightening the muscles before hitting the ball or striking the target. This is the exact opposite of what should be done. Tension destroys relaxation, compromising speed and technique. When speed and technique are compromised, power is comprised and the result is a weak and often clumsy hit, kick or strike, not a powerful one. And this lack of power and proper execution begins in the mind. When the mind hears the word, "harder," it often equates that word to "stronger," and failure follows. *Harder* doesn't equal *stronger*.

Mental stress can also create tension. How often have employees or students developed tension headaches because of stress? Too many to count for sure. Yet, tension-generated stress and its subsequent physical manifestations such as headaches, can be remedied in the mind because ultimately, when we think about it, it is the mind reacting to the stimuli that causes the tension and its subsequent ailments. In effect, what has happened is that we have allowed an outside

external stimulus to affect us. The fault lies in us not controlling ourselves, not in the stimulus or stimuli.

This may seem an unfair statement to make, but it is true. We're not victims when we experience tension headaches. Frankly, we're the cause because we did not control or neutralize the incoming energy as efficiently as we could have, whether that energy resulted from a boss being too demanding, projects coming due, tests lurking on the horizon or any number of other possibilities. These so-called causes are all neutral and not causes at all. We're the ones who translate them into stress, and therefore we're the cause of the effects, i.e., headaches. Once we understand this link between ourselves and the outside world, we can manage the outcome more efficiently and healthfully. Remember, *this is our life; it is our responsibility*. We can't control other people, events or circumstances extraneous to us but we can control how we respond to such things. *Control is the mark of a master*, and if we're going to master ourselves and our life, we must master energies and influences bombarding us from the outside world and not allow them to control us. If we do allow them to control us, we, not they, are the cause.

The second way to manage relaxation is through technical expertise. This aspect demands we learn our craft and know how to execute every part of it while using the least amount of energy needed to perform the task. To learn efficiently, begin by executing each move, whatever it is, slowly and in a relaxed manner. Gradually increase speed while remaining relaxed. If you tense up, start over. It's important to develop technique that is both correct and relaxed. Keep practicing . . . perfectly, until the desired results are achieved. In this way we can help *maximum the minimum*.

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