

# The Art of Mental Training

## Chapter 2

### On Attitude

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During one lesson I noticed Leo-tai looking at me as if he was trying to decide whether I was really listening.

“A bad attitude can cost you everything, Danielsan; it affects not only how you feel, but also how you perform. This you must remember, for when you teach,” he told me.

That’s how he’d start sometimes. Just throw something out to see if he’d caught my attention.

I remember teasing him once, saying, “I know when you do that.”

“What?” he asked innocently.

“You know, check to see if I’m really listening.”

“Really? And did you know that I know when you know that you *think* you know what I’m doing?”

The truth is: I *was* listening, it’s just that his teaching method was so spontaneous that, no matter what mood I was coming from, I had to set it aside right away as he started, or I might accidentally offend the creative old soul. . . So, I responded, “What do you mean for when I teach?”

“Oh someday, I’m sure you will,” he said. “Now, always remember, a warrior learns how to control his internal mental climate. And having a good attitude helps him to achieve that control by creating an expectation of success. The right attitude helps empower him to take the necessary actions and to focus on the things that must be done— a good attitude can make all the difference.”

“Why?” I asked. “What makes it so powerful?”

“The reason is quite simple,” he said. “It’s because a good attitude, a positive attitude, creates optimism, positive energy. And positive energy is much better at setting good things into motion than negative energy is. Warriors with negative attitudes become victims of their own negative outlook; they lose because their own negativity drains them. Winning has a lot to do with having a good attitude. Not only in competition, Danielsan, but also in life generally. You must always remember that.”

Many years later my mind flashed back to that lesson.

I was dealing with an elite athlete trying to come to terms with a very tough competitive loss. While still deeply hurt, he asked me, “What’s the use of working on keeping a positive attitude? It didn’t seem to help me—did it?”

It’s at times like these that I wish Leo-tai could step in. When an athlete is devastated one must tread lightly. I set out to try and explain what Leo-tai had taught me (and had somehow known that I would need to help someone else understand one day).

“Listen,” I told him, “I know you’re upset, and I also know how hard it is, because I’ve been on this path before you. But I’m here to tell you, as a wise old teacher once told me, that working on keeping a positive attitude is what will help you work through this bad patch. A positive attitude will create the opportunity for a great comeback. It helps create the opportunity for a great performance—A positive attitude never works against you. But a negative attitude will always find a way to work against you. Even if one finds a way to win despite a bad attitude, the fact is that he could always have performed better still.”

Like Leo-tai used to do with me, I caught myself looking to see if my athlete was listening. I don’t like to offer up what Leo-tai taught me if I sense an athlete is tuned out. In his case he was soaking it up, so I felt encouraged to go on.

“A champion teaches himself the skill of turning things around inside his head. He learns how to look at a negative setback both as temporary, and even as an opportunity for positive change. He knows that the things he can learn from his loss will make him even better, even stronger, in the long run. The mental warrior learns from his setbacks and he doesn’t allow them to distract him from reaching his true potential.

“So keep your self-talk positive. Keep your outlook positive. By doing so, you give yourself the best chance to perform well. Take on your inner feelings with courage and determination; and never allow a bad attitude to hold you back from achieving the level of personal success that you are capable of.

“Never beat yourself up after a loss—there’s always something positive to be gained, something to be learned, even from a negative situation.”

“I remember how after an especially tough and disappointing loss one of my kid champions summed it up. ‘I was doing well,’ he told me. ‘I’m better than he is. I’m not sure what happened—but next time he won’t be so lucky.’

“So you see? You must choose to stay positive,” I told him, “Even a kid can do it.”

“I know,” he said slowly, “But right now, I just feel so bad, I feel so low.”

I understood the heaviness in his heart, the disappointment, and as Leo-tai had taught me, I wanted him to understand that he had the power to turn this thing around in his head.

“Look, try this,” I pointed up to the clock on the wall. “Give yourself just five more minutes to feel bad about this thing if you really feel you need to, and then after those five minutes are up, *decide* to start seeing the experience as an opportunity to help you figure out how to create a positive change in the level of your play. Turn it around in your head.” I urged.

He looked up at me and nodded. Mental control starts with a decision. It was clear that we had a deal.

Five minutes later, I watched him walk out of that locker room right on time, just as I’d expected him to. You could tell by the way he walked that the decision had been made. The temporary setback had now become an opportunity for positive change. He had turned things around in his head. He was focused on the opportunities that lay ahead for positive change. He had decided that his attitude would be positive.

It's not always easy; it takes a decision and a different point of view.

Champions can do that—and so can you.

**Remember: The Warrior/Champion understands that a bad attitude can cost him everything. It affects not only how you feel, but also how you perform.**