

The Art of Mental Training

Chapter 20

Do The Work

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Once, after having knocked out his opponent during a professional Mixed Martial Arts event, Renzo Gracie was interviewed by a commentator who suggested that Renzo had only won because he'd been lucky. Without missing a beat, and with a shrewd smile on his face, Renzo famously replied, "The harder I work, the luckier I get!"

What a champion—and what a true champion's response!

With very few exceptions, the truth is that the best athletes usually turn out to be the ones who work the hardest. While most athletes will tell you that they want to win, very few of those talented enough to make it to the top are willing to put in the hard work and dedication that becoming a champion demands. As a coach it's easy for me to spot the athlete determined enough to be willing to pay the price. For a start, it shows in the effort and consistency put forth during practice. Secondly, the best athletes love the process of doing what it takes to become the best they can be. There's a measurable difference in their level of commitment and confidence over most athletes because they actually enjoy working hard at getting better.

Listen to what legendary football coach Vince Lombardi once wrote about this type of commitment. "A man can be as great as he wants to be," he said. "If you believe in yourself and have the courage, the determination, the dedication, the competitive drive, and if you are willing to sacrifice the little things in life and pay the price for the things that are worthwhile, anything can be done. Once a man has made a commitment he puts the greatest strength in the world behind him, this thing we call *heart power*. Once a man has made this commitment, nothing will stop him short of success. The harder you work the harder it is to surrender."

Yet in spite of this, quite often an athlete with astonishing levels of God-given talent chooses to cruise along without putting much effort into improving himself. He gets comfortable and rather than working hard to take his talent onto another level, he doesn't put in the work required. Eventually, many harder-working athletes will surpass such athletes. So don't be discouraged if you're not exactly what a coach would consider a huge talent. Hard work, effort and enthusiasm will still bring you good results as long as

you stay the course. And if you happen to be extremely talented, just remember that such talent can be either a blessing or a curse. Talent is no blessing if you let yourself stagnate because playing well comes relatively easily to you. The mental athlete knows that in order to excel one can't just do enough to get by.

After one of my young students won a national championship I asked him if it felt good to see all his hard work finally pay off. He admitted that it felt pretty good, that he was really happy.

“So what are your plans now Mr. National Champ?” I teased him. “Are you going to take a break?”

“No way,” he said. “Now every kid wants to beat me, I have to work even harder now if I'm going to stay champion.”

Smart ten-year-old. He'd already realized that he was going to have to work harder than ever in order to maintain his high level of success. Yet I could tell by the gleam in his eye that he was excited about the prospect.

The truth is that real champions want to do the work. They are willing to do not only whatever it takes to get to the top, but also whatever it takes to stay at the top. True champions are willing to pay the price in order to improve.

Think about what Renzo Gracie told that commentator, “The harder I work, the luckier I get!”

So how determined are you to make your own luck happen?

Remember: Once you really make the commitment to work hard at becoming a champion, something powerful is set in motion—heart power.