

The Importance of Resilience: How experiencing failure made me a better martial artist.

The most devastating and disappointing moment in my journey through the martial arts came when, testing for Nidan, I failed. How that failure came about, it turned out, was not as important as what occurred on my journey after it.

The Japanese have a proverb: "Nana korobi ya oki" (literally: seven falls, eight getting up) that speaks to the concept of resilience. No matter how many times you get knocked down, you get up again. It is especially important to remember this proverb when times are at their toughest. There are no quick fixes in life, so anything of real worth will of necessity take a lot of struggle and perseverance. Success doesn't need to be quick or instantaneous—it's much more important that one simply does their absolute best and remains persistent.

Resilience, then, is that quality possessed by some individuals that allows them to be knocked down by life and come back stronger than before. Rather than allowing failure to overcome them and drain their resolve, they find ways to rise from the ashes. So what traits do these individuals have that make them resilient? Some of these factors include a positive attitude, optimism, the ability to regulate emotion, and the ability to see failure as a form of helpful feedback. Even after misfortune, resilient people are able to change course and soldier on. Some individuals possess this quality innately, while others learn it under unique circumstances.

Following my first attempt at Nidan, there was a lot of anxiety about both my performance, and how it reflected on my peers and my Sensei, Ken Hoggart. Fortunately for me, the test occurred early in a weekend devoted to training with Soke LaMonica and other members of the combined dojos. I didn't have an opportunity to retreat from my peer group and was therefore immersed in the remainder of the training weekend. This turned out to be a very good thing, especially in the 24 to 48 hours following my attempt.

During the long path that makes up our training in Hakko Denshin Ryu Jujutsu, we make and keep many close friends and training partners. These individuals share with us a desire to learn, enjoy and achieve in the art, and at times of failure come together as a support network to help lift you above the negativity that failure sometimes brings. This is what I experienced immediately after testing. From my own local peer group, all the way up to Soke LaMonica, I found that I had many individuals willing to help me move forward. The key to this however, was entirely in my court. I needed to ask, I needed to push my self up and get myself motivated, and ultimately, I needed to ask for help.

And help was offered without reservation. It came in the supportive actions of my peers, and in the positive and constructive feedback from Sensei Hoggart and Soke LaMonica. It gave me the necessary "shot in the arm", to bolster my resilience and push myself forward. Failure did another thing... It also made me much more cognizant of how I train

and how I learn. I resolved myself to ensure that the next time I tested, I would be ready and able to perform at the level I thought necessary to achieve my goals. This is the true key to resilience. Use the negative experience to help inform yourself about the future, and use those lessons to avoid the same problems. From there the path was already laid out in front of me. It was cloudy for a while, but it was always there, it just needed the clarity that sometimes only failure can bring.

Since that time, I have moved forward with my goals, but always in the back of my mind reside the lessons I learned from that unsuccessful attempt. Most importantly is the ability to empathize with others struggles. This has helped me to show compassion to others but also understand that sometimes the best "shot in the arm" comes from being present only, and allowing mistakes to be made. I've also found that this has been a perfect complement to my learning how to become a successful instructor in the dojo. Students are by nature, their own worst critics, and inevitably get down on themselves so much that they get in their own way of progressing. Having experienced this myself, I find I am much more equipped to help them breakthrough and move on.

There is a quote by Henry Ford, "Failure is the opportunity to begin again more intelligently", that speaks volumes to how we teach the Art in the dojo. A unsuccessful attempt is always a success if you take the time to reassess your mistakes, learn from them and use them to improve your technique. By doing this, we commit to the next step on our path, and move forward. Understanding this as an instructor is a very integral part of passing on the techniques and traditions of our Art. By teaching our students the value of resiliency, we give them the skills they need to recover when they sometimes do not succeed.

Should I ever stumble again on the path, I now know that I possess the skills I need to pick myself up and carry on, and that the art itself has been a tool to strengthening my resilience. Mind you, if it is at all possible to avoid failure, then by so means, take that path; but should you stumble along the way, don't worry. Your peers, instructors and yourself are more than a match in moving you forward.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'AS' followed by a stylized flourish.

Respectfully submitted by Andrew Scott
19 June 2016