

Bend without breaking

THREE LESSONS FOR MASTERING CHANGE IN YOUR LIFE

At the highest levels of the martial arts, there is a test given to those who apply to become a master. Following hours of intensive skill demonstration, both in solitary forms and in combat with multiple opponents, the student is asked to sit in complete stillness on the floor. A thin glass rod is then placed in his hands, and he is given the simple instruction: "Bend without breaking."

Over the next several hours, the student must bend the glass rod, using a careful combination of pressure, heat from his hands and patience.

Are the circumstances of your life or your job forcing you to change, perhaps even to the point of breaking? If so, then the lessons of this simple but demanding test can help you master the challenges you face.

Apply constant gentle pressure.

Most students who hold the glass rod break it within the first few minutes. Because they are anxious to finish and see the end result, they unconsciously apply more and more pressure until the sound of the rod suddenly snapping in their hands signals their failure.

When the requirements of your job are changing, it's easy to believe that you must master every new aspect immediately. Not only is this impossible, it can overwhelm you to the point that you lose your ability to perform even in areas where you were already strong. Focusing on too many changes at the same time will ultimately lead you

to a break — in your results and in your confidence.

Instead, identify the few most important changes you must master and then build a plan for the daily or weekly improvements that will lead you to that level. Designate a specific objective for each week, such as practicing a new skill for a certain number of hours or reading background material, and then build your confidence by consistently accomplishing it.

Approaching a significant change through small adjustments will not only lead you to the outcome you want more quickly, it will make you stronger in the process.

Use the heat of your inner fire.

Pressure alone would not allow the glass rod to bend. The martial artist knows that it is the heat from his hands that also enables the result to be achieved.

Every time you allow your mind to dwell on thoughts about what has happened to you, whether or not it was fair or who was to blame, you are literally dousing the inner fire that is essential to your success. These thoughts, whether true or not, place you in the role of victim — a role from which you will never generate the heat needed to change.

Instead, use the power of your mind to reinforce the outcome you truly want: success in this new chapter of your life.

The most powerful way to shift your thinking is through gratitude. Each time you are tempted to focus on your difficulties, simply begin to list all the things for which you are grateful. While it may feel awkward at first, saying phrases such as, "I am grateful for my family. I'm grateful for my health. I'm grateful to have a job and the ability to support the people I care about," will literally transform your thoughts and will give you the energy and optimism you need to change.

Be patient.

Real change takes time. You cannot force a plant to grow faster by commanding it to hurry. Most often, the pressure you are placing on yourself is actually greater than any that is being placed on you by others.

By making a plan for consistent progress and harnessing the power of your thoughts to keep your confidence strong, you will have the tools you need. All that remains is to give yourself time to make them work.

No matter how dire your challenges may seem today, they are just as likely to represent the beginning of a great new chapter in your life for tomorrow — one where the changes you are making are a needed prerequisite. By using the lessons of gentle pressure, inner fire and patience, you will be able to adapt and move into the future that is waiting for you. <<



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