

Leverage your limitations

THREE KEYS TO FINDING AND DEVELOPING YOUR STRENGTH



I was already complaining before I arrived at the dojo that day. I was tired from four days of business travel, and my ankle was throbbing with the pain of a sprained Achilles tendon that wouldn't heal.

As I stretched to loosen my 53-year-old body, I looked around at the other students, most of whom were almost three decades younger. I envied their youthful energy and thought of how much more difficult it was for me to keep up my training with the added challenges of my job, a demanding schedule and my aging muscles — all obstacles that I believed they did not face.

At this same moment, I noticed a new student in the class. She was a beautiful blond girl standing patiently while one of the instructors wrapped a protective cloth around her left hand in preparation for sparring. Even though I could only see her left side, it was easy to tell that she had the lean, muscled look of an athlete.

"Now, there's a perfect example," I thought. "Youth, athleticism, beauty — that young girl has everything."

And then she turned to face me. Where her right arm should have been, there was only a portion extending from her shoulder about six inches.

As the class began she took the spot next to me, saying "Hi, I'm Cindy." For the next hour, I watched in amazement as this remarkable young woman responded to every command from the instructor. While I struggled to complete my push-ups, Cindy finished them easily

using only one arm. Jump squats, forward rolls, lunges and sit-ups were all done as well as anyone else — and without a single complaint.

But most remarkable of all was Cindy's ability to spar. She refused any help with her boxing glove, opting instead to hold it in her teeth while working her hand inside and then sealing the Velcro closure with her chin.

In the ring, she was fearless, jabbing with her left hand and slipping the blows that would have been defended by her missing right. Her punches, knee strikes and kicks flew with devastating accuracy.

When class was over, I introduced myself and asked Cindy if she would tell me the secret to her unshakable spirit. Over the next 30 minutes, she gave me three powerful keys to overcoming life's challenges.

Accept who you are. Most people spend tremendous energy in hiding their limitations, and then live with the fear that others will discover them. The need to be perfect can become a debilitating prison whose walls are defined by all that you lack. As Cindy said, "My amputated arm is a part of me, a part of what makes me unique. If I hide it, I'm only making myself something less. But if I just accept it, then I'm free."

Self-confidence and a strong sense of personal worth come from more than just your strengths — they come from

accepting every aspect of who you are. When you accept yourself, you know your own value without needing the acceptance of others to confirm it.

Take responsibility for your life.

"It's easy to let your limitations become an excuse for all the things you didn't have the courage to do," Cindy said. "I could have believed that a person with one arm could never be a fighter, but it wouldn't have been true."

Refuse to let your limitations define you, whether it's a physical limitation like Cindy's arm or your financial position, education or age. Instead, have the courage to push out of your comfort zone. You'll never know your true capabilities until you try.

Leverage your limitations. "Not having an arm has actually made me a better fighter," Cindy said. "Because I can't defend on my right, I had to become quicker to avoid being hit. Because a left jab is my only punch, it had to become stronger. And because I only have one arm, I had to really develop my kicks. My real strengths as a fighter all came from my one limitation."

Look for the leverage in your limitations and focus on where they can make you stronger. When you do, you will find the courage and strength to move beyond limitation to create the life you want. <<

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