

If it doesn't challenge you,
It doesn't *change* you.

Challenge. Change. These are two things that many people try to avoid. In life however, challenges and changes are inevitable. As they cannot be avoided then logically the better course of action is to embrace them and make use of them.

When we overcome challenges, we learn new skills, we grow in healthy confidence and self-belief and we develop a more resilient and positive mindset *because we have already experienced that we are capable of dealing with problems.* If you have never tried to do something, how do you know whether or not you can do it? The more times you have confronted a new challenge and found a solution, the stronger your skillset and self-belief system will be.

Another proverb that explains this says, "Calm seas do not make good sailors". If you have only ever sailed in calm seas, what has prepared you for sailing safely through a storm? While sailing in calm seas may be lovely, actually we all need to be able to cope with the unforeseen problems that life sometimes throws our way. It is overcoming tough experiences that really shapes and strengthens us. We can be fooled into thinking we are good at something when we find it easy but it is when something gets harder that we really find out what we are capable of and when we really develop the right skills for dealing with it.

What has this got to do with karate?

Two things: firstly, challenging training will improve our karate; and secondly, the challenges of karate training will help us to overcome other difficulties successfully – even if it is just because we have developed the right mindset.

So if you want to improve your karate or if you want to use what you learn in class to help improve your life skills, just remember our club motto:

TRAIN HARD, FIGHT EASY
– because if it doesn't challenge you, it doesn't *change* you.

If you want to understand a little more about why we say this, please feel free to read on

In karate many things come in threes: kihon, kata and kumite for example. Mind, body, spirit is another. In this case, the trio is: challenge, change and control.

Challenge, change and *the illusion of control*

Everyday living gives us the illusion of control: we have so much apparent control over endless things. It is easy to avoid experiences that are not instantly pleasing. In the immediate moment of course, that is not a problem. But never learning to tolerate experiences that are less than enjoyable means it is harder to handle situations that are really difficult or unpleasant – and sooner or later we all have to do that. How and when that happens is usually out of our control. Just think of coronavirus.

How does challenge help my karate? And how does karate help with challenges?

One of the benefits of karate training is to build your physical and mental resilience and resourcefulness to deal with difficult situations. The main purpose of traditional karate is to teach self-defence – and if you are in a situation of having to defend yourself or others, it is by definition not a comfortable one. It is also not one you have complete control over. If you had complete control you would not be in danger in the first place.

Traditional karate training develops the whole person to prepare you for the worst both physically and mentally – and, in order for us to improve, our training should take us outside our comfort zone. If you want to increase your fitness and strength, there is no point just doing a handful of exercises that do not require effort and exertion. If you want to improve your technique there is no point only practising it a few times then resting. To improve your kumite, you need to partner up with people better than you because there is no point sparring someone who cannot beat you. Essentially, if you want to progress, develop and succeed you have to be prepared to try things that you might fail at (at least to begin with) because you cannot learn how to overcome a problem, fear or limitation without taking it on and attempting to tackle it. To improve yourself, there must be a challenge to overcome.

And, where better to try things out and find out if you can do them than in training? That is the point – training and practice in a controlled, safe environment so that you do not find yourself in a challenging or threatening situation for real without being properly tested and prepared.

Traditionally, karateka come together to train in the dojo. Coronavirus and lockdown mean that is not possible at the moment so we have had to adapt - and for many of us our homes and gardens have become our temporary dojos. There are many benefits to this - improving our kihon and kata and our kumite drills with solo practice will prepare us for improved partner work, as will maintaining our fitness and strength training. This different approach in lockdown has opened up new ways of thinking about what we do and to improving how we do it.

Karate is not just for the dojo.

As the saying goes “Karate is not just for the dojo”. This means it should complement and enhance our everyday lives. It also means that we should not just think of our training as only happening during a karate class. Just as karate enhances our lives, our lives should enhance our karate. After all, dojo loosely translates as ‘the place where you train and learn the way’.

So we should not limit the challenges we embrace to those we can find in the dojo. Every day we are presented with situations that we could view as problems or which we could view as opportunities to progress in some way. How we view that choice comes down to our mindset.

So remind yourself: TRAIN HARD, FIGHT EASY because if it doesn't challenge you, it doesn't change you.

See beyond the illusion of control. Embrace challenges as an opportunity to develop. Use those experiences to change you for the better.

