

Sensei Says

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For many people the beginning of a new year is a time to reflect on the past and plan for the future. It is a time to reevaluate goals and make sure our greatest efforts are going towards what we value most in life. Some people make very specific New Year's resolutions – and usually break them before Auld Lang Syne is over. The most successful resolution-makers seem to be those who do not attempt to make radical life-style changes, but who gently nudge themselves back on course.

I have made my share of radical resolutions over the years. I had my last soft drink on New Year's Eve 1986 (with the exception of an occasional Henry's root beer). At the same time I also resolved to never again drink any alcoholic beverages. From 1991 to 1996 I undertook a very old ritual of spirit training – taking showers in only cold water. (I figured that after five years my spirit had gotten about all it could out of that exercise!)

In 1996 I resolved to perform Taikyoku Shodan (the basic karate kata) 10,000 times. This required executing the kata 33 times a day for 303 consecutive days. The next year I spent studying another kata - Pinan Shodan - performing it over 10,000 times.

To keep a resolution takes resolve; and it can be a character-building exercise. For me to quit drinking alcohol took very little resolve, since I never really liked the stuff anyway. For others, the same goal requires strict discipline every day of their lives – much like stepping into an ice-cold shower every morning.

Once we determine our priorities, we have to be diligent about making the choices that keep us on track with our goals. Hmmm ... I feel a story coming on ...

Unlike most Eugeneans (who have at least two jobs and go to school), I have had only two jobs in my life. One, of course, is teaching martial arts; the other was as a journalist.

During my junior and senior years of high school I was fortunate enough to land a job writing for the sports department of the local newspaper in Missoula, Montana. I was also the sports editor of my high school paper. Sporting events mainly occur on the weekends, as do most martial arts events. Often I would ask for weekends off so I could attend special training courses or tournaments.

One Friday night, after asking for Saturday off so I could enter a taekwondo tournament, the sport's editor asked me to have a seat at his desk. "Alan," he said, "you can't just keep taking time off for these karate things. If you're going to do this job you have to have commitment. It's time you do some thinking about it, and get your priorities straight."

Now, one would think that since he was the sport's editor he would understand why I wanted to compete in a sport. I was the high school state champion in taekwondo (which, by the way, is a sport). Amazingly, he didn't see the connection.

My response was immediate and direct. "I do have my priorities straight," I said, "and my priority is martial arts, not this job."

Needless to say, I was laid off two weeks later.

Every day we encounter people who expect us to shift our priorities to accommodate theirs. Pleasing them is not the way towards our own self-fulfillment and happiness.

I hope that during this New Year you have the strength to keep your actions in harmony with your goals to make it your most amazing year yet!

- Alan Best