A Winning Mindset

Randy Borum, University of South Florida
No competitor likes to lose, but the best competitors in virtually every sport know how to transform a loss into an opportunity to improve. Even if you don’t compete in the martial arts, you can apply the same methodology to any challenge or undertaking.

Research conducted by Stanford psychology professor Carol Dweck has shown that most people have one of two types of mind-set: fixed or growth. Those with a fixed mind-set believe that their positive traits and potential for success are essentially limited. You either have them—in whatever amount—or you don’t.

On the other hand, those with a growth mind-set are more into possibilities. They believe that positive traits and skills can be developed and that they can overcome failures to ultimately achieve success.

Georges St. Pierre is wrapped with the interim-championship belt after defeating Matt Hughes at the Ultimate Fighting Championship 79.

In rebounding from a loss, your mind-set will affect how you understand and explain what happened. Developing some explanation—for yourself and for others—is usually the first step in determining whether and how you’ll move forward. Losing can be devastating for a competitor with a fixed mind-set because he’ll assume he failed because he “just wasn’t good enough.”

Georges St. Pierre demonstrated the advantages of a growth mind-set after losing his Ultimate Fighting Championship title to Matt Serra. St. Pierre consulted a sports psychologist who helped him realize
that it isn’t always the best team that wins the game; it’s the team that plays better. St. Pierre modified his personal explanation for the loss, saying, “I truly believe I’m the best fighter in the UFC, but on that night, Serra fought a better fight than me.”

When asked why he didn’t fight to his potential, St. Pierre said: “I forgot what was my No. 1 priority. My No. 1 priority is to stay champion and [be] the best in the world. I forgot that, [and] I paid for it. I made a mistake, but I’m the type of guy that never makes the same mistake twice.”

Remarkably, his conclusion was: “I truly believe that this loss is probably the best thing that ever happened to me.”

Being an effective competitor in the martial arts—or doing any challenging task, for that matter—requires that you develop faith in yourself and your ability. Having faith means that you can believe in yourself when you’re consistently landing your strikes and when you miss. Although you botched the last takedown attempt, you’re confident that you’ll get the next one. The key to bouncing back from a loss is to never lose faith in yourself.

Different people recover from setbacks in different ways, but here’s a quick formula that you can adapt to your own needs.

First, develop an explanation to “frame” and understand the loss. Try to explain it from a growth mind-set rather than a fixed mind-set. It’s natural and acceptable to feel disappointment, but try not to wallow in it. If you let yourself spiral down into a self-critical cycle, it will undermine your faith and confidence. Maintain your core belief in your ability, grieve the loss and move on. Remember what many athletes say: If you’ve never lost, you’re not competing against the best people.

Second, develop a plan for what and how you can improve. If you identified any holes in your game, work with your coach or training partner to develop strategies for fixing them. Reflect on your loss like an objective observer. If you’re coaching yourself, consider what will make you better.

Third, envision that plan working. Once you have a clear explanation of what went wrong and an account of what needs to change, spend time visualizing how your game will look after you enact your plan. In your mind, take time to see and feel the success of your plan. Imagine what you’ll be like when you’ve taken your game to the next level, then step inside that image. Experience unswerving faith in your ability.

Finally, move forward with confidence. The loss was an event. Your disappointment was just a mental event. It doesn’t define you or determine your future. Part of the envisioning is to move forward. That vision contains everything you need to retain from the past event. It’s over, and reliving the negative emotions won’t enhance your performance.

Your task is to implement your plan with faith and a positive focus. Scientists suggest that the human brain is naturally wired to be negative. If you don’t take control of your thoughts, images and emotions, you might have to go a few more rounds with the “what ifs.” But you can thoughtfully direct what you say to yourself and the emotions you generate. Reduce the negatives and create positive messages. With resilience, you can grow as a martial artist and create a mind-set that will carry you to success.

About the author:
Dr. Randy Borum is a professor at the University of South Florida. He’s a licensed and board-certified psychologist recognized by the National Institute of Sports Professionals. To contact him, visit www.blackbeltmag.com.

---

**World Open Full Contact Karate Championship**

**Fighter Applications Available Online NOW!**

(Application deadline is March 1st)

Sat. April 19th, 2008

Denver Merchandise Mart

Denver, CO

Open to all styles. 3 men’s weight divisions, open women’s division.

For more information:

Sabaki Challenge

4730 E. Colfax, Denver CO 80220 (303) 320-7632

Photo by Peter Lockley

www.sabaki.com