

The Trap of “Try”

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The words of Yoda are simple, “Try not. Do — or do not. There is no try.” They have become a mainstay on the mat and in the room of things Water Tiger for good reason.

But, what is that reason? Why do I maintain that these simple words from this classic 1983 sci-fi movie, *Star Wars: Episode VI Return of the Jedi*, carry such weight?

The short answer is that “try” is a trap. That trap is expressed a little differently by Keesuke Miyagi in 1984’s *The Karate Kid*. When Daniel LaRusso responds to Mr. Miyagi’s query of “Ready” with “Guess so”, this is the fix-it man’s response:

Walk down road. Walk on right side, fine; walk on left side, fine; walk in middle, and “squish” like grape. Karate same way. Either you karate do “yes” or karate do “no”; karate do “guess so” and eventually “squish” like grape.

Both Luke’s “try” and Daniel’s “guess so” express a lack of focus. The former expresses a lack of belief in self and the latter reflects a lack of commitment. Neither set the feet in the direction of success.

I mention Mr. Miyagi not to muddy the water of “try”, but to share his point that we must change the language we use when we train. We do this to sharpen our commitment and create an internal voice that supports our journey instead of takes us on a detour. My work before Water Tiger became full-time was for an elearning company, Quester IT. Its product, Merlin CSR, was designed to train customer service representatives to change the language they use to not only connect more with the people on the other end of the phone line or across the counter, but to also deepen their own development skills, e.g., responsibility, follow-through, etc. The product was built on a proven thesis: when you change the language, you change the behavior.

When we say we are going to try, we open the door that leads to failure. We express doubt that success will follow the effort. We hedge our bets.

In Beachbody’s P90X3 there is a workout called *The Challenge*. It is 30 minutes of pull-ups and pushups in four, double rounds. The concept of the workout is to choose repetition numbers for pulling and pushing and hit the numbers through the entire workout. For example, 12 for pull-ups and 30 for pushups. I can tell you, this workout doesn’t do anything for you if you “try” to hit a number. You either get there or you don’t. And, when you don’t, it’s because you’ve given it all you’ve got. A word of caution is needed here. Be mindful. You should push yourself to the point of fail and not beyond it; and, the only thing you should pull is your chin to the bar and not a



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Do — or do not.
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muscle. In other words, giving 100% is committing fully to the work that needs to be done and not breaking yourself. That's how you get better. It works the same on the mat or in the room.

Don't "try" to coordinate the lower body with the upper body. Coordinate them.

Don't "try" to flow from one movement to the next. Flow.

Don't "try" to find a way to modify a movement to your own body dynamic. Modify it.

Don't "try" to set aside time to practice. Set the time aside.

Don't "try" to stand on one leg. Stand on it.

Don't "try" to do your best. Do your best.

Saying that you will "try" to do something is to lay the foundation for an excuse when there is failure. It might sound something like this: "Well, I tried, but ..." As a wise man once said: "... nothing someone says before the word 'but' really counts ..."

Why is it so hard to commit to what it is we are about to do and not "try" to do it? Todd Henry puts it well in his blog post on this topic, *Everything I Need To Know About Productivity I Learned On Dagobah*:

... if I attempt to do something with all I have and I fail, then there is a good chance that I'll have to stare at my own limitations and deal with my mortality. I'll have to face the fact that I'm not as capable as I wish or imagine I am.

Although coming face to face with failure and owning it can be a very scary thing, it is the door to discovery. It is the door to success. It is the first step to defining the line that marks where our current limitations fall. Note the word choice: *current*. A limitation today does not have to be a limitation tomorrow — or, next week, next month, next year.

So, quit trying and do. You'll be better for it, you'll be happier, and you won't "squish like grape". Or, as Tony Horton from Beachbody says: "Decide. Commit. Succeed."

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Todd Henry: Everything I Need To Know About Productivity I Learned On Dagobah, accidentalcreative.com.

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