

ATAWorld

CREATING TOMORROW'S LEADERS ... ONE BLACK BELT AT A TIME

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How to
Get Fit as
a Family

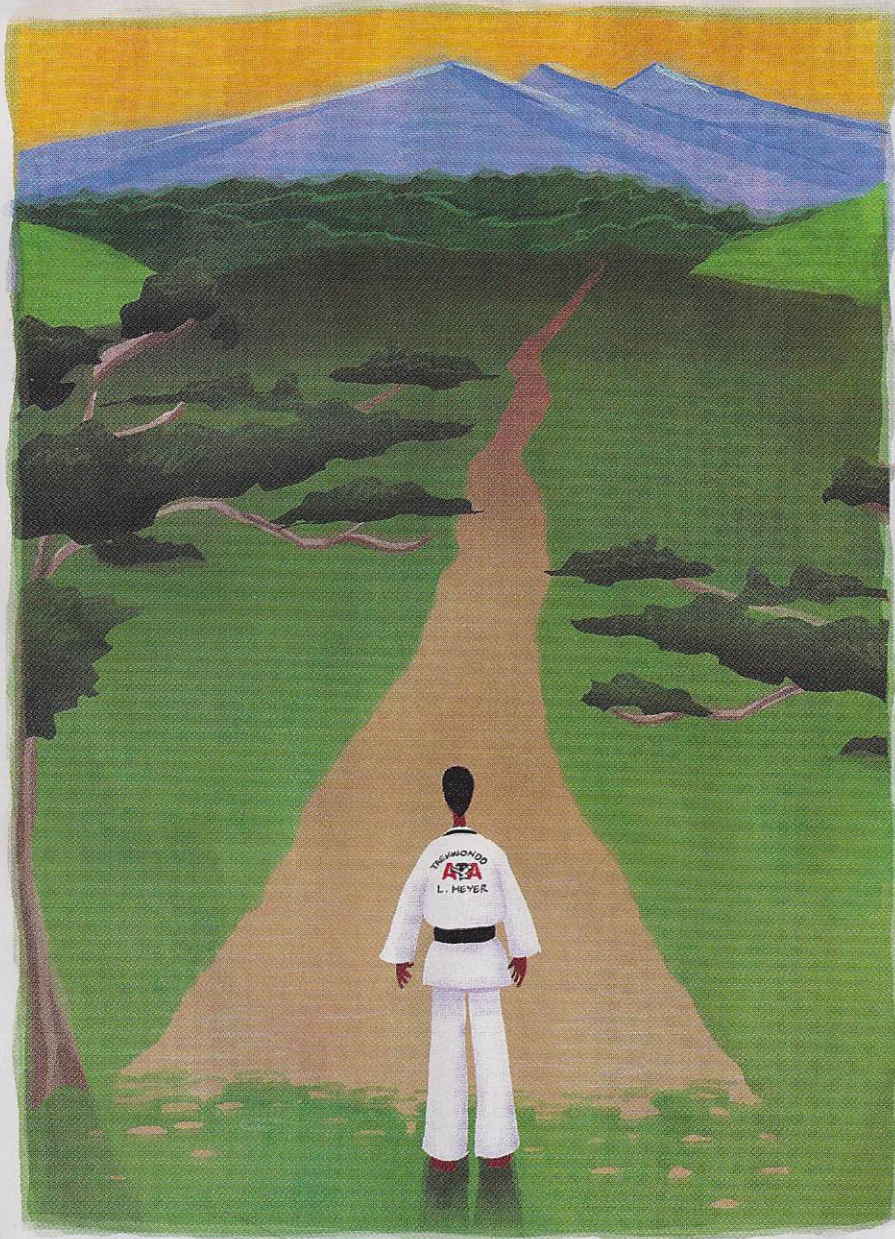
Training Together

**ATA
Careers:**

Make Your
Passion Your
Profession

Strong Stances A Step-by-Step Guide





The Patience Effect

Learn to stay positive, grow with your mistakes and enjoy the journey. by Susan T. Lennon • Illustration by Randall Nelson

We live in a world where immediate gratification is possible, from instant messaging, to express mail, to satellite TV. But you can't snap your fingers and become a

black belt. Achieving that goal requires hours in the do-jahng, plus discipline, a positive attitude and, perhaps most important, patience. "If your goal is to climb a mountain, you can't start at the

top of the peak," says Senior Master Tony Isaacs, 7th Degree Black Belt, of Miami, Fla. "You have to take it one step at a time."

In the Do-Jahng

Unlike other activities, Taekwondo is primarily a solitary pursuit. You improve through practice and repetition, and when you make a mistake, you can only look at yourself. When training gets hard, it can be tempting to give up, especially if you're constantly comparing yourself to others or thinking about how far you are from your black belt.

When you get discouraged, Isaacs offers this advice: "Put your impatience in perspective. You're halfway up the mountain already!" You might also remind yourself where you started when you first came to class. Remember all of the things you never thought you'd be able to do? "Look at yourself now!" Isaacs says. "You're doing forms, your sparring is coming along, and you're breaking boards and starting to teach other students. You've come a long way! Don't stop now. Put the focus back on your initial goals."

With Yourself

Master Jack McInerney, 6th Degree Black Belt, was 36 when he started training at his doctor's suggestion. As an adult, taking up a martial art or any new sport is a challenge. But McInerney's goal was to become "the me that I wanted to be."

At each level, he focused on one particular goal and believed that with practice, he could achieve it. "At blue belt, I wanted to do a jump spin crescent kick. At brown belt, a jump spin hook kick. At each belt level, I set a specific, difficult goal," he says. "To keep from getting frustrated, I'd go to my instructor and ask him to break it down into smaller steps. He'd act like a doctor and give me prescriptions on how to fix each little thing: Shift your weight over here, put your head over the right foot instead of keeping it in the middle."

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McInerney learned that he could achieve any goal by visualizing the end result and patiently putting in the time necessary to accomplish it. You can do the same thing. Go with the flow; don't put yourself on a strict deadline. When you stop measuring your progress against where you think you "should" be, you kick frustration to the mat and free up your mental energy.

Use that newfound energy to focus on what you're learning, whether it's a new self-defense move or a way to better yourself, and allow yourself to enjoy the process. "It's not just learning the techniques," says McInerney, who now teaches in Sayreville, N.J. "After a tournament, if someone asked me how I did, I never said whether I won or lost. I always said 'I learned.' To me, that's the real winning."

With Others

In the same way that kids want instant gratification and an instant black belt, parents often want "instant character," Isaacs says. "Parents want us to fix the fact that their kids don't have patience or discipline—something that's been ongoing for several years."

In the ATA, instructors learn how to meet this challenge and help boys and girls reach their potential, but parents must understand that change takes time. "With time, you can do just about anything," says Isaacs, who believes so strongly in the importance

of patience he tells instructors to "promote patience, self-control and indomitable spirit as a life skill" each month. Applying these principles helps students inside the do-jahng and out.

In Life

Irritations happen no matter what you do or who you are. Taekwondo teaches

you to manage whatever comes your way without letting anger, annoyance or other emotions take the lead. "How we handle things in life reflects who we are," Isaacs explains. "If we boil over, we lose credibility in the do-jahng and in our personal life. I encourage everyone to cultivate patience."

"A Master is not somebody who wakes up and is able to do a side kick perfectly," McInerney adds. "A Master is somebody who works on it relentlessly to make it perfect." In the same way, when you practice patience, self-control and indomitable spirit, you can become the person you want to be, get that black belt and achieve mastery both in class and in life. **ATA**

Susan T. Lennon, a 2nd Degree Black Belt, writes about health-related topics for various national publications.

Patience 1-2-3

Senior Master Tony Isaacs, 7th Degree Black Belt, of Miami, Fla., offers three tips for developing patience:

1

Build Relationships. "When it comes to people and circumstances, build relationships," he says. It's easy to become irritated with people who cut you off in traffic because you don't know them personally. But when you develop self-control, you respect others more and can go through life more calmly and successfully.

2

Be Flexible. Respect yourself and build up your mental attributes so that you can adjust to any situation that comes your way.

3

Learn from Others. Find a mentor and watch how he or she handles pressure. When you see a person turn a potentially volatile situation around with a sympathetic word or an unexpected gesture of kindness, you realize the true power of patience.

—S. T. L.