

Make Your... **“MARTIAL”** *...Mind Up?*

One of the ways I earn my living is by working with athletes as what is becoming labelled as a ‘mind coach’. Increasingly it is being recognised that getting the best out of yourself, in any sporting arena, involves more than skills training and physical conditioning. When push comes to shove it’s the strength of the mind that determines the victor. But it’s also becoming more than just a question of developing mental strength; findings from psychology and Neuroscience are also suggesting ways in which our mind can have a vital part to play in honing the physical side of our performance too.

It’s interesting to me that within the Martial Arts this side of preparation seems to be slow in being taken advantage of, because the Eastern philosophy inherent in many Martial Arts focuses a great deal on issues of mastering the mind, creating a ‘no state’, and taking personal responsibility for ‘creating’ yourself.



One small example is found in the Japanese novel *Kokoro* by Natsume Soseki, spoken by a revered Sensei:

“Nobody is born a warrior, in exactly the same way that nobody is born an average man. We make ourselves into one or the other.”

I see my role as helping my clients develop what is already contained within them by using the way their mind works to their advantage. I help them ‘make themselves into a warrior’.

Essentially I assist them by getting rid of any mental clutter that holds them back and teaching three things:

- * How to use their thoughts to guide their bodies to greater levels of achievement
- * How to focus their minds on what they want to achieve, and
- * How to get out of their own way.

In my new role as a writer for *Combat* I’m going to be using these three categories to give you some ideas about how you can use techniques currently being utilised by top athletes to take your fighting to a new level. And you’ll be amazed how quickly improvement can come.

One of the problems with working with your mind is that you didn’t come with a handbook. Most of us are startlingly ignorant of how we think.

For example, if I ask you if you think in black and white what is your answer? Had you ever thought of it before I asked you?

Many of you will agree not, and yet differences or preferences of this kind can make a marked difference to the effect you get from what is on your mind. I’ll come back to that later. We also make the mistake of thinking that everyone else thinks the way you do. Ask your friends whether they see pictures in their heads when they think. Most will say yes, but some no. How many have a voice they listen to? Fewer will say yes, but still a sizeable proportion. How many feel their emotions colour their thinking a lot? These differences can make a huge difference to how well you do in school, what environments you learn best in, what hobbies you prefer, and even who you’re likely to get on with - because people tend to like people who are like them, even if these levels of similarity appear largely unconscious. Teachers who don’t understand this

principle will tend to teach how they like to be taught, which won't be the way all their students will respond to. Our favourite teachers are often so because they happen to 'speak your language'.

So when I begin to talk about techniques and strategies I'll attempt to avoid falling into the same trap, and encourage you to extract the principles from what I'm describing and adapt them to the way your mind works.

In this issue I wanted to give you some ideas that you can use straight away and notice the difference they make; that way you'll be looking forward to my next column!

Changing the fabric of your thoughts

I mentioned earlier about the small differences in the way we frame our thoughts that can make a big difference to the results we get. I train people in something called Neuro Linguistic Programming, which is a form of psychology that looks at differences in the way people construct their reality. When I asked you if you think in colour and black or white, that is called a submodali-

ty difference. If our five senses - sight, sound, touch, taste and smell - are modalities, sub-modalities are the 'building blocks that comprise them; so visual submodalities (smds) include whether your thought is a moving or still image, in colour or black and white, and whether you see yourself in the thought or experience it in the first person. Kinaesthetic (feeling) smds include whether what you're feeling is hot or cold, light or heavy, and where it is located in your body. To a large degree we know the difference between excitement and fear, for example, not because they feel different in themselves, but because we interpret them differently because they happen in a different part of the body.

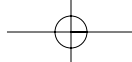
The next time you feel excited, notice where you would point for the feeling of it in your body. The next time you feel nervous or scared do the same. Practice being able to move your nervousness to where you feel excited and notice how the feeling changes. Like anything else it's a skill that gets easier with practice. Then, before a fight, if



you're feeling nervous in a way that isn't helping, guess what you'll be able to do. One of the biggest lessons I teach is that feeling don't have to happen to you; you can happen to your feelings.

Try this: Ask yourself "If confidence had a colour what colour would it be?" I know this sounds like a weird question, but our brains naturally associate things as part of the way it understands how the world works (it's called equivalencing), so while you might find it an odd ques-





tion the odds are that an answer came quickly to your mind. The colour itself isn't important - but you'll find that if you try this out on your friends they'll come up with different answers, which shows what I said earlier about how we all think differently. Next odd question is "If it had a shape what shape would it be?" Again, the shape itself doesn't matter. The third odd questions is "If you could imagine this red circle (for example) in front of you, which way is it spinning?"

Now comes the 'so what' part. What happens if you increase the rate of spinning? Does the feeling of confidence grow, reduce or stay the same? Once again you're causing your brain to seek an equivalence between different states of the thought. The great majority of people will find that altering the speed and/or direction of spin will make a difference to the strength of the feeling. This technique - imaginatively called Spinning - can be used on any feeling, to make a positive one stronger, or a negative one weaker.

And one last example of how manipulating submodalities can have an instant effect on your emotional state, or physical ability: Take

a medium size weight and hold it at arms length. Use a clock to measure how long you can hold it without your arm dropping. Be honest and strict with yourself. Now, odd question time: "If your strength had a colour, what colour would it be?" "If it had a shape, what shape would it be?" And if you put that feeling in a place inside you that would be the source of your strength, where would you put it?" Excellent. Once again, none of those answers are important in themselves, we've just set your brain up with an equivalence of strength = that colour.

Now pick up the weight again and hold it in front of you in the same way. As you do, imagine that colour of strength flowing from its source all the way to your arm, all the way along your arm right to your fingers. Imagine beaming it like a Luke Skywalker light-sabre out of the end of your hand. Focus your attention on that colour, keeping it moving from its source all the way through your arm. And notice how much easier it is to hold the weight up, and how much longer you can do so.

These seem like simple tricks - and that's because they are, but it



doesn't mean they lack power. In one article I've given you techniques that could help you minimise negative feelings, maximise your confidence and focus, and increase your power. All you have to do is get good at using them. Imagine throwing a punch or a kick with that colour of strength flowing from it. Practice it and notice how much more powerful you can make it. As I said in my article last month; what I teach as Cognitive Hypnotherapy is neither spooky nor rocket science.

So incorporate these ideas into your preparation and see the difference they make to you, and I'll continue next month.

By Trevor Silvester

