



DARE TO BE GREAT!

Bruce Lee's Motivational Principles to Enhance Your Life

Chris Kent

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To say that Bruce Lee was the most influential martial artist of the twentieth century is an understatement. At the time of his death, Lee was considered by many to be the premier martial artist of the day. While this is a compliment to say the least, in reality, Bruce Lee's physical abilities were only the tip of the iceberg. In addition to being one of the world's top martial artists, Lee was also a philosopher and one of the original champions of self-actualization and human achievement. Even today, four decades since his untimely passing, Lee continues to be an inspirational force motivating people to care for and nurture their bodies and souls and bring out the best they have within themselves.

I'm aware that many of you may be well acquainted with the fact that Bruce Lee was an exceptional martial artist. But it wasn't Lee's physical attributes that ultimately made him distinct from every other martial artist. Rather, it was his mind. I would like to take you into the mind of Bruce Lee, and share with you some of the motivational principles that Lee used to actualize his true potential in life, in the hopes that you may do the same for yourself.

Many factors militate against individual success. And while some are external, most of them come from within. Even though individual situations vary, the underlying principles governing human behavior apply to us all. People who procrastinate, lack motivation and habitually underachieve all operate within similar self-limiting concepts. Often, individuals with sincere intentions never get started on the path toward their goals, or they fall by the wayside en route. Aside from serious illness or personal tragedy, the reason is usually unfounded personal doubts.

As Lee once said:

"Each man binds himself; the fetters are ignorance, laziness, preoccupation with self, and fear – He must liberate himself."

So how can each of us, like Bruce Lee, rise above mediocrity and live a fully actualized and richly rewarding life? How can we learn to overcome the ogre of doubt and to honestly express ourselves to the utmost of our ability? How do you prevent your natural fears and moments of insecurity from becoming a ball and chain of self-doubt that will prevent your wings of confidence from growing? How do you become what we are fully capable of?

Fortunately, the edge possessed by Lee was not an accident of birth, randomly bestowed upon a blessed few. It is a trait that can be cultivated by anyone. Once you have a grasp of the following motivational principles, you can cultivate, maintain and even nurture them to greater levels –

Principle 1 -- Take Control of Your Own Attitude

Years ago, the American psychologist Abraham Maslow asked a group of his students: "Which of you expects to achieve greatness in his chosen field?" When, after a lengthy pause no one responded, Maslow asked: "If not you, *who* then?" The students saw his point. Maslow called it the "fallacy of insignificance" – the belief, held by many, that their lives are unimportant and that they are powerless to change them. Bruce Lee, like Maslow, believed that each individual has within them the means by which to forge their own destiny and to overcome adversity.

As difficult as it might be for some to believe, Bruce Lee was never more powerful than when he was set upon by adversity. Facing a near crippling back injury or the recognition that Hollywood had no interest in his talents as a leading man, in addition to facing the scorn of racists on both sides of the Pacific and the collective if silent disapproval of many in the American martial arts community at the time, these were moments in Lee's life when the power of his character and intellect were most clearly manifested. His approach to viewing these matters was not to treat them as "problems" that might break him, but as "challenges" for his will to overcome.

Bruce Lee recognized that the obstacles he faced were all sustained by only one thing; a thing that each of us controls – the human attitude. Lee understood that all of these challenges would fall away once he took control of his own attitude. In a book categorizing his thoughts and ideas concerning various subjects entitled *Striking Thoughts* (Tuttle Publishing - © 2000) Lee explained his belief in the power of attitude when facing adversity and dealing with challenges in the following four statements:

- *You have your choice – you are master of your attitude – choose the POSITIVE, the CONSTRUCTIVE –*
- *"Serene, detached from all results, ready to fight or run, to win or lose, and always ready to laugh at all things, take whatever comes."*
- *"One who is possessed by worry not only lacks the poise to solve his own problems, but by his nervousness and irritability create additional problems for those around him."*
- *"It is not what happens that is success or failure, but what it does to the heart of man. No man is defeated unless he is discouraged."*

This speaks to Lee's belief facing problems as they are and not worrying about them -- but choosing to "keep punching" against them. To impose his will on the facts at hand. And lest you think that Bruce Lee was born with a powerful will, let me point out that such was not the case – he was not born with it, he cultivated

it, thereby revealing through his example that it is possible for anyone to cultivate their own will to succeed. As Lee indicated:

“The power of will is the supreme court over all other departments of my mind. I will exercise it daily when I need to urge to action for any purpose, and I will form habits designed to bring the power of my will into action at least once daily.”

Lee wrote the above statement in his daytime diaries for the years 1967 to 1969 – and he read it daily so that he could take steps necessary to cultivate a more powerful will.

Recognize, as Bruce Lee did, that you are master of your own attitude. Choose to take control of it and utilize the power of it in all you do.

Principle 2 -- Focusing on the Positive

Rather than dwell upon our mistakes, defeats or shortcomings as negatives, we should instead use them as challenges that provide valuable opportunities for learning and self-correction on the road to success. A perfect example of this was Bruce Lee's fight with a Chinese martial artist in Oakland, which came about as a result of Lee teaching gung fu to people who were non-Chinese. According to witnesses who were present during the altercation, it took Lee less than three minutes to defeat his opponent and force him to give up. Now most martial artists would probably have crowed about their victory and their ability to “kick ass.” Not Bruce Lee. Lee immediately recognized what he had done *wrong* in the fight and used that as a challenge to be overcome. As a result of feeling unusually winded after the altercation, he began an entirely new fitness regimen – leading, in time, to his becoming the paragon of physical fitness that millions of people have come to admire. Moreover, he also recognized the limitation of his semi-traditional approach to fighting and thereby started on the road to creating his revolutionary martial art training process known as Jeet Kune Do.

Many times, individuals will focus so much on what they did wrong in a particular situation that their “will batteries” can run dry and as a result they become paralyzed by inertia. The ability to direct thought to the positive is not inherited. It is something we have to train ourselves to do. You must learn to monitor your thoughts and keep tabs on the concepts in your mind. When you see a negative thought come into your mind, you must nip it in the bud by generating positive thoughts. In other words you must intercept and destroy the negative thought the moment it arises. According to Lee, whenever he had a negative thought come into his mind, he would visualize himself writing it down on a piece of paper, wadding it up into a ball, then setting fire to it, thus destroying it and removing it from his memory forever.

Keep in mind that focusing on the positive is not simply “positive thinking.” It also involves “non-negative” thinking, which relates to how we think and talk to ourselves when something goes wrong. It’s imperative to eradicate the destructive things we tend to think and say to ourselves when we fail at something or experience some sort of setback.

Principle 3 -- Learn From Mistakes

Life is not static. It’s an ever-evolving process that we embark upon awkwardly at first, with little or no knowledge. Human beings are creatures of habit and are bound to make mistakes whenever they step out of their routine. When Bruce Lee first began acting in America, he admitted to making mistakes, but he learned from them. As he said, *“When I first arrived I did the Green Hornet television series. And as I looked around, I saw a lot of human beings. But as I looked at myself, I was the only ‘robot’ there because I was not being myself. I was trying to accumulate external security, external technique; the way to move my arm –but never to step back and ask, ‘What Bruce Lee would have done if such a thing happened to me?’”* Lee then learned from his mistake, continuing: *“I learned something, and that is to be always yourself; to have faith in yourself, to express yourself.”* This truth that Lee learned from acting, he also saw as a truth he could apply to martial art – or anything else in life --

The simple truth is that it’s okay to make mistakes – as long as you can learn from them, and figure out what caused you to make them so you don’t repeat them in the future. In martial art, there’s no shame in being knocked down, as long as you can ask yourself, *“Why am I being knocked down?”* Mistakes are often your best teachers. All success in life is built upon a series of mistakes. Accept them as part of your learning process.

Principle 4 -- Compete Only With Yourself

Do you know why so many people drop out of martial art programs and health club fitness programs? It’s because they compare themselves to other people in the school or gym and feel they don’t stack up. This attitude is irrational. Because of differences of age, genetic predisposition, personal preferences and aptitudes, some people shine in certain arenas of endeavor while others prove brilliant in different in other areas.

Sometimes, when I am teaching, I notice a student in the school looking about at other students and I can see that they are comparing themselves to another person. I pull them aside and quietly tell them to keep in mind that when they are looking at other students, many of those with better physiques, greater flexibility, or superior technique or stronger kicking power may have been training longer, or may even be a little more motivated than them to become more proficient.

We are constantly being invited to compare ourselves with other people. But comparing yourself with others is a fruitless enterprise, because you are not someone else. People who habitually compare themselves to others can't figure out why their confidence yo-yos up and down. The worst thing you can do is look around and compare yourself to anybody else. It wastes your time, your energy, and has nothing to do with your own path. The only person you can accurately compare yourself with is *yourself*. So stop comparing, and remember that the competition is with yourself.

Principle 5 -- Refuse to Accept Limitations

As the saying goes, "If you think a thing is impossible, you will make it impossible." The mind is tremendously powerful, more so than many of us really know. We have all heard stories of the woman who seeing her son pinned under a car rushes to his aid and lifts the car off of him. For years, the four-minute mile was considered impossible to achieve – until Roger Bannister broke it, and then four others did likewise within six months of his achievement. Why? Because now they believed it was POSSIBLE. Bruce Lee was keenly aware of the mind's power and how often the biggest obstacles we must surmount are self-imposed. One of the best examples of this lesson occurred when Bruce Lee was running with his private student, Stirling Silliphant one day:

I was running every day. Bruce had me up to three miles a day. Really at a good pace, you know. We'd run the three miles in 21 or 22 minutes. Just under eight minutes a mile. So this morning he said to me we're going to go for five. I said, "Bruce, I can't go five. I'm a helluva lot older than you are, and I can't do five." He said, "When we get to three, we'll shift gears and it's only two more, and you'll do it." I said, "Okay, hell, I'll go for it."

So we get to three, we go into the fourth mile, and I'm okay for three or four minutes, and then I really begin to give out. I'm tired, my heart's pounding, I can't go anymore and so I say to him, "Bruce, if I run anymore, I'm liable to have a heart attack and die." He said, "Then die."

It made me so mad that I went the full five miles. Afterward I went to shower and then I wanted to talk to him about it. I said, "Why did you say that?" He said, "Because you might as well be dead. Seriously, if you always put limits on what you can do, physical or anything else, it'll spread over into the rest of your life – It'll spread into your work, into your morality, into your entire being. There are no limits. There are plateaus, but you must not stay there, you must go beyond them."

(Source: Stirling Silliphant quoted in the book entitled *Bruce Lee: The Biography*, by Robert Clouse, Published by Unique Publications, © 1988)

As you travel along your path in life, you will inevitably find yourself coming up against various physical, mental or emotional barriers or obstacles that will pop up from time to time and prevent you from achieving what you want to achieve. And how you deal with each of those obstacles will determine whether it becomes a limitation or not. Choose to “turn the stumbling block into a stepping stone.” Push past your limits. According to Bruce Lee, *“There are no limits. There are only plateaus, and you must not stay there, you must go beyond them.”*

Principle 6 -- Be a Goal Setter

A corollary to the above principle is the principle of goal-setting. Human beings are future-oriented animals, and get the best from themselves only when they have something to look forward to. Lee wrote of the power of visualization and of the mind in bringing such visions, dreams and desires, to reality:

I begin to appreciate now the old saying “he can because he thinks he can.” I believe that anybody can think themselves into his goal if he mixes thought with definiteness of purpose, persistence; and a burning desire for its translation into reality.

As a prerequisite for achieving success, Bruce Lee cultivated the attitude of writing down his goals, whether in the form of personal mission statements, or even committing them to paper in a letter to a friend. In the case of the personal mission statement, in 1969 Bruce Lee committed to paper his “Definite Chief Aim,” which reads as follows:

“I, Bruce Lee, will be the first highest paid Oriental superstar in the United States. In return I will give the most exciting performances and render the best of quality in the capacity of an actor. Starting in 1970 I will achieve world fame and from then onward till the end of 1980 I will have in my possession ten million dollars. I will live the way I please and achieve inner harmony and happiness.”

Lee then signed and dated the paper. The purpose of putting his goal in writing was that it served to keep Lee focused on his objective of becoming a successful actor who gave performances of the highest quality. And it came to pass – and long before 1980. He was the “highest paid Oriental superstar in the United States”; he did give “the most exciting performances” and “rendered the best of quality in the capacity of an actor” (which is why his films continue to be so popular today – some 35 years after his passing); he did achieve “world fame” and, at the time of his death, he was being offered one million dollars U.S. per film and owned 50 percent of a film studio (Concord Films) that stood to make 150-million dollars as its share of the profits from his last film *Enter the Dragon*.

Bruce Lee's success was no fluke; a major part of it was the result of his devotion to goal-setting.

The setting of goals is important for two reasons. First, goals are necessary for direction. If you don't have them you can end up drifting, stagnating, or following detours that may take you far off in the wrong direction and waste your time. Second, goals are useful for feedback purposes. They provide you with a reference point, and by comparing your current position with the reference point you can figure out what adjustments or corrections need to be made. Be a goal-setter. Make sure that the goals you set are clear and well-defined, as vague or poorly defined goals will lead to poor or sporadic results.

Principle 7 -- Do Not Accept Defeat

In 1970, while doing a particular weight training exercise with a heavy barbell, Bruce Lee sustained a serious back injury. Doctors diagnosed that he had permanently damaged his fourth sacral nerve, and restricted him to bed rest for three months, followed by another three months of just moving around the house. They told him to forget about his martial art training, and even inferred that he would probably never be able to kick again. This was a devastating blow to a man who literally lived in a state of perpetual motion. At this point Lee could have felt sorry for himself, raised his arms in surrender and simply thrown in the towel. But such was not the case. Lee refused let his injury wipe out the positive vision of the future that he held so firmly in his mind. Instead of accepting the doctor's diagnosis and viewing the injury as permanent, he viewed it merely as a challenge, a temporary barrier to be overcome, and held firmly to the belief that eventually he would heal. In the months of recovery during which he was unable to channel his energy physically, he channeled it mentally instead. Utilizing his library of over three thousand books, he read extensively and wrote constantly, putting down on paper his notes, thoughts and ideas concerning martial art, physical fitness, philosophy and film. Determined to prove the doctors wrong in their dire predictions, carefully and gradually Lee re-trained himself physically, from walking with assistance to eventually performing his full range of martial art motion. Not only was Lee able to resume his martial art training and kick again, he became a better martial artist than he was before the injury.

In his personal notes he wrote:

Defeat is a state of mind; no one is ever defeated until defeat has been accepted as a reality. To me, defeat is merely temporary, and its punishment is but an urge for me to greater effort to achieve my goal – Defeat simply tells me that something is wrong in your doing; it is a path leading to success and truth.

And:

"Fall down nine times, but rise again ten times."

It was a lesson that Lee applied to his daily life. Even though his back continued to plague him until he died, he refused to let the injury dictate his life. There is no better example of Lee's attitude regarding this very matter, than in a letter he wrote to his friend and martial art colleague, Jhoon Rhee in 1971:

Here I ask you, are you going to make your obstacles stepping stones to your dream, or stumbling blocks –because unknowingly you let negativeness, worries, fear, etc. to take over you? Believe me that in every big thing or achievement there is always obstacles, big or small, and the reaction one shows to such obstacles is what counts, not the obstacle itself. There is no such thing as defeat until you admit so yourself – but not until then!

(Source: Bruce Lee's handwritten letter to Jhoon Rhee, circa 1971, Jhoon Rhee Papers)

Principle 8 -- Spiritual Realization

The “fuel” for all of the foregoing principles just mentioned was Bruce Lee's principle of Spiritual Realization, or the tapping into your own creative force. Whether you choose to refer to it as Chi, God, Tao, or whatever, it is, as Bruce's student Kareem Abdul Jabbar once said of it, “one of life's willable miracles.”

It is important to remember that you – Just As You Are – have this power within you already to realize your dreams – just as Bruce Lee did. In a letter written to a family friend in 1962, Bruce wrote:

Before he passed away, some asked the late Dr. Charles P. Steinmetz, the electrical genius, in his opinion, “What branch of science would make the most progress in the next twenty-five years?” He paused and thought for several minutes then like a flash replied, “SPIRITUAL REALIZATION.” When man comes to a conscious vital realization of those great spiritual forces within himself and begins to use those forces in science, in business, and in life, his progress in the future will be unparalleled.”

Conclusion

Bruce Lee was a human being like the rest of us. And like many, if not most of us, he had dips in self-confidence and struggled at times in terms of where his future was going. What separated Bruce Lee from the majority of other people is that he never let those struggles get in the way of his drive toward perfection. He did something about it. Each day he strove to actualize his potential in every facet of his life.

Merely reading the principles listed above won't make you a success. As the saying goes, “Knowing is not enough; you must apply – Willing is not enough;

you must do.” You have to integrate these principles into your brain, so that eventually you will automatically think, feel and act accordingly. Only habitual daily reminders of the need to act upon these suggestions will program your brain to provide clear, effective and decisive output that will start and keep you on the path to success. The teeming energy or “spiritual realization” that fueled the success of Bruce Lee is available to anyone, and can be yours. Again, it’s not as though he was born with it and others not. Like Bruce Lee, you too can develop the winning attitude and achieve greatness at whatever you do. In closing, I leave you with a few final words from Bruce Lee:

My will to do springs from the fact that I can do.

I have long come to discover through earnest personal experiences and dedicated learning that ultimately the greatest help is self-help. That there is no help but self-help, to honestly do one’s best, dedicating oneself whole-heartedly to a given task, which happens to have no end but, rather, is an on-going process.”

About the Author

Chris Kent is widely acknowledged as one of the world's foremost authorities on Bruce Lee's martial art known as Jeet Kune Do. With over forty years of experience, he has gained international recognition for his knowledge and leadership in perpetuating the art, training methods, and philosophy developed by Lee, and is considered one of the few individuals in the world having total comprehension of all facets of Lee's martial art.

As a teacher and professional consultant, Chris has traveled the world, teaching and sharing the benefit of his expertise in Jeet Kune Do with thousands of people.

Chris has authored 3 of the highest rated books on Jeet Kune Do: ***The Encyclopedia of Jeet Kune Do***, ***Jeet Kune Do - The Textbook***, and ***Jeet Kune Do Kickboxing***. In addition he has both written for and appeared in countless martial art publications both nationally and internationally including *Inside Kung Fu*, *Black Belt*, *Martial Art Masters*, *Budo International*, *Combat* and *Martial Arts Illustrated*. He has also written and produced 3 series of training videotapes and DVDs which remain the standard of the industry.

His latest ground-breaking book, ***"LIBERATE YOURSELF! - A Guide to Personal Freedom"*** and ***"P.L.A.N. - Personal Liberation Action Notebook"*** detail how individuals can apply the philosophical tenets of self-actualization utilized by Bruce Lee to their own lives.

"For three decades, Chris Kent has immersed himself in the martial arts education founded by my late husband, Bruce Lee. In addition to being highly skilled in the technical aspects of Jeet Kune Do, Chris is an excellent teacher and has a firm grasp of martial arts philosophy and its practical application."

Linda Lee Cadwell
Bruce Lee's widow

"Chris Kent is one of the most knowledgeable and experienced Jeet Kune Do instructors in the world."

Ted Wong
Bruce Lee's close friend and last private student

"Never content to blindly accept only one source of information on Jeet Kune Do, Chris Kent has spent decades researching the history, art, science and philosophy of Bruce

Lee's art and studying under only the most qualified and authentic practitioners. His keen mind, coupled with his insightful and dedicated approach to training, have resulted in the cultivation of awesome physical skills, and made him one of the foremost authorities on Jeet Kune Do in the world."

John Little

World-renowned Fitness Author, Filmmaker

"Chris Kent is a descendant of the Bruce Lee legacy, and an instructor whom I consider to be an unquestionable disciple who will do his part to ensure that Bruce Lee's art will not become distorted and lost in the future."

Taky Kimura

Bruce Lee's senior-most student and oldest friend

If you would like more information concerning personal training, seminars, workshops, or speaking engagements, the author welcomes you to visit him online at: www.personalliberation.com or e-mail him at personalliberation1@gmail.com.

Other Books by Chris Kent

The Encyclopedia of Jeet Kune Do – A to Z

Jeet Kune Do Kickboxing

Jeet Kune Do -- The Textbook (originally released as "June Fan/jeet Kune Do -- The Textbook")

Jeet Kune Do Essentials (Vol 1) - Focus Gloves

Jeet Kune Do Essential (Vol 2) - Kicking Shield

Jeet Kune Do Essentials (Vol 3) - Heavy Bag

LIBERATE YOURSELF! - A Guide to Personal Freedom

P.L.A.N. - Personal Liberation Action Notebook

Other Products by Chris Kent:

Jeet Kune Do From A to Z (dvd series)

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