
Depth vs. Width - A Life Lesson

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Date : 09-08-2020



Have you heard about Josh Watzkin?

If not, google about him. He might be the most interesting person alive.

He doesn't have Twitter. And he barely uses the internet.

Here's a summary of his life so far :

1. Was a chess prodigy and a national champion.
2. Two-times world champion in Tai Chi push hands
3. The 1st black belt in Jiu-Jitsu under Marcelo Garcia (A Brazilian, 5 times Jiu-Jitsu champion)
4. He's now in an unknown ocean town mastering surfing + advising elite investors

Here is an important lesson that I picked from his life and that can be used by each one of us if we really want to succeed at something.

Depth Vs. Width

Most of the average people or low-level achievers try to become experts in everything after getting average success in one field. You may find them interesting as they can talk about each and every subject & they have a point of view on almost everything.

Waitzkin is different - he emphasizes on having a focus -to get deep knowledge in one thing at a time.

He's achieved more WIDTH across disciplines in 43 years than most could in 100 lives.

How?

It is because of his obsession with DEPTH over WIDTH.

His life is the testimony to deep work and singular focus.

He spends 5-10 years of his life dedicated to each craft.

Even when he approaches a new discipline, a new sport, a new field, he goes for DEPTH within the DEPTH

E.g. Chess

Most players just play countless games

Instead, Josh insisted on having only 3 pieces on the board - King & Pawn vs King

He drills micro positions until he understands them from first principles.

I fear not the man who has practiced 10,000 kicks once, but I fear the man who has practiced one kick 10,000 times" - Bruce Lee

Waitzkin's theory is that once you've understood one thing so deeply in the discipline - you understand the principles

You can then copy & paste those insights to the next levels.

Waitzkin turns the discipline into a video game He then identifies what level 1 of that video game is. He doesn't start level 2 until he understands the principles of level 1 at a fundamental level He continuously expands his circles of competence.

Here're different stages of learning if you want to master anything :

Learning phases: 1. Unconscious incompetence - "I don't know how bad I am"

2. Conscious incompetence - "This sucks. I know how bad I am"

3. Conscious competence - "I can do this if I focus"

4. Unconscious competence - "I don't remember the last 10 minutes of driving my car"

The area where most of us quit is No.2: CONSCIOUS INCOMPETENCE.

The feedback says you suck. At that time ego comes up with numerous reasons to quit

Waitzkin defeats this stage early on by deeply understanding level 1 before moving on to level 2

in contrast, we often try and play the high-level game, we want to become an expert at the very beginning, without undergoing the grind of deeply understanding the principles at the very first stages.

This behavior and habit of ours -to play like an expert with very little learning, without going through the apprenticeship period - is our biggest enemy.

The issue with acting as an expert at the starting stage or with rushing through learning any new thing is that there's so much complexity at higher levels that we don't feel like we're progressing and we feel like we're not understanding the subject.

And here, conscious incompetence hits us. And most of us quit at this stage.

I'm always struck by the fact the LAST TIME most adults ever push through conscious incompetence is DRIVING LESSONS

Most of us shut down the learning process after driving. And most of us forget about the stages-of- learning we went through while learning to drive a car or bicycle!

Waitzkin is the polar opposite- he overcomes all potential frustrations while spending more time at the very beginning, by learning first principles.

"Be like a postage stamp-stick to one thing until you get there"- Josh Billings

If you want to learn more from Waitzkin , you can listen to him here.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LYaMtGuCgm8>

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