



Action vs Inaction

We've all had time where a hundred small tasks (each one of them seemingly important) have eaten up the entire day. We've not stopped "working" for a minute; our day has been filled with "action", but come bedtime the big report still isn't done, even though that was the one thing we really wanted to get finished.

Now I am not saying that there is anything inherently wrong with action – in fact I'm a strong advocate for it!

But only a very specific kind, and that's "effective action".

What is the difference between 'Effective' and 'Ineffective' action?

Effective action is doing the right thing at the right time. In the martial arts, it might be performing the appropriate block against an attack at exactly the right moment, not a second before or after.

Ineffective action is like trying to block an attack by constantly swinging your arms around hoping that you will deflect a punch at some point. At the end of training you're tired and likely accomplished very little.

So how do I know if my actions are 'Effective' or 'Ineffective'?

The best way is to examine how you feel after performing a task: effective action gives you a feeling of accomplishment. You may or may not have something tangible to show for your work, but you will certainly feel that you have made progress towards your goals.

Ineffective action leaves you with a small sense of dissatisfaction. You may have tangible results, but you are often disappointed with your progress, as if you haven't accomplished as much as you had hoped.

Having recognised which is which, the next question is likely to be:

How can I increase my 'Effective action'?

This is where balance comes in! The Chinese Yin-Yang circle – which is half black, half white with a dot of the opposing colour in each section – shows that everything contains the seed of its opposite.

In other words: the seed of effective action is actually held within inaction. By simply taking a little time to be inactive, reflect upon our actions and consider new options we are able to better identify those that will be most effective.

We can see the application of this principle in many different domains. Just as a warrior would remain perfectly still, waiting for the right opportunity to move, an accomplished leader considers the destination before they set off on the journey.

Correctly applied, this concept leaves us far more successful at directing our effort and energy towards what is most important to us.

Some questions you might want to consider whilst 'inactive':

“Do the actions I took today reflect that which is most important to me?”

“Did my actions achieve the desired outcome?”

“How else could I go about getting that result more efficiently?”

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