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The last update on March 17, 2020, Josh Waitzkin led a full life as a master of chess and an international martial arts champion, and at present he is not yet 35. The art of learning: The inner journey to optimal performance chronicles his journey from chess wunderkind (and the subject of the film Finding Bobby Fisher) to the Taiji chi Chuan World Championships with important lessons identified and explained along the way. Marketing expert Seth Godin wrote and said it was necessary to decide to change three things as a result of reading a business book; reader will find many lessons in waitzkin volume. Waitzkin has a list of principles that appear throughout the book, but it's not always clear exactly what the principles are and how they connect with each other. It doesn't really hurt the readability of the book, however, and it's at best a minor inconvenience. There are many lessons for an educator or supervisor, and as someone who teaches college, was president of a chess club in high school, and who began studying martial arts about two years ago, I found the book attractive, obsessive and teachable. Weitzkin's chess career began among the headscarves of New York's Washington Square, and he learned to concentrate amid the noise and distractions it brings. That experience taught him the ways outs and outs of aggressive game of chess, as well as the importance of endurance on the part of the caged players he interacted with. It was discovered in Washington Square by chess teacher Bruce Pandolfini, who became his first coach and developed him out of quirky talent into one of the world's best young players. The book presents Weitzkin's life as a study on contrasts; perhaps this is deliberate given Wejckin's admission of admiration for Eastern philosophy. Among the most useful lessons concern the aggression of park chess players and young prodigs who brought their queens into action early or who set complex traps and then pounced on the mistakes of opponents. These are excellent ways to quickly dispatch weaker players, but it doesn't build stamina or skill. It contrasts these approaches with attention to detail, leading to true skill in the long run. According to Weitzkin, the regrettable reality in chess and martial arts— and perhaps by expanding education—is that people learn many superficial and sometimes impressive tricks and techniques without developing a subtle, nuanced command of fundamental principles. Tricks and traps can hit (or win) the gullible, but they have limited utility against someone who really knows what he or she is doing. Strategies that rely on fast mates are more likely to w weaken against players who can reject attacks and get one into a long midsoever game. Smashing inferior players with four-run checkmates is superficially satisfying, but it does little to better their game. It offers one child as an anecdote who has won many games against inferior opposition but who has refused to embrace real a long series of victories over clearly inferior players (p. 36-37). It reminds me of the advice I've received from a friend lately: always try to make sure you're the dumbest person in the room, so you're always learning. Many of us, however, draw our self-esteem from being a big fish in small ponds. Weitzkin's discussions cast chess as an intellectual boxing fight, and they are particularly apt given his discussion of martial arts later in the book. Boxing acquaintances will remember Muhammad Ali's strategy against George Forman in the 1970s: Brigadier was a heavy hitter, but he had never been in a long fight before. Ali won with his rope-a-dope strategy, patiently absorbing Brigadier's punches and waiting for brigadier to exhaust himself. His chess lesson is apt (34-36) as he discusses promising young players who have focused more intensely on winning quickly rather than developing their games. Waitzkin builds on these stories and promotes our understanding of learning in Section 2 by discussing the essence and gradual approaches to learning. Entity theorists consider things innate; So you can play chess or karate or be an economist because he or she was born to do it. Therefore, failure is deeply personal. In contrast, incremental theorists view losses as opportunities: step by step, gradually, a beginner can become a master (p. 30). They rise to the occasion when presented with heavy material because their approach is focused on mastering something over time. Entity theorists disintegrate under pressure. Waitzkin contrasts with his approach, in which he spent a lot of time dealing with end-of-game strategies where both players had very few pieces. By contrast, he said, many young students start by exploring a wide range of opening options. This damaged their games in the long run: (m) any very talented kids expected to win without much resistance. When the game was a struggle, they were emotionally unprepared. ... For some of us, pressure becomes a source of paralysis, and mistakes are the beginning of a downward spiral (para. 60, 62). As Weitzkin argues, however, a different approach is needed if we are to reach our full potential. A fatal flaw in shock-and-trepidation, a blitzkrieg approach to chess, martial arts, and ultimately anything you need to learn that anything can be learned rote. Waitzkin scrambles martial arts practitioners who become form collectors with fancy feet and twists that have absolutely no fighting value (117). You can say the same about sets of problems. It's not to get the basics—Weitzkin's focus in TaiJi was to clarify certain fundamental principles (117),but there is a profound difference between technical possession and true understanding. Knowing moves is one thing, but knowing how to determine what to do next is quite another. Weitzkin's intense focus on exquisite foundations and processes meant he remained strong in round of round opponents withered. His approach to martial arts is summed up in this passage (c. 123): I have condensed the mechanics of my body into a powerful state, while most of my adversaries have had large, elegant and relatively impractical repertoires. The fact is that when there is intense competition, those to whom it succeed have slightly more sharpened skills than the rest. It's rarely a mysterious technique that drives us to the top, but rather a deep skill of what may well be a basic skill set. Depth beats width any day of the week because it opens the channel for the intangible, unconscious, creative components of our hidden potential. This is about much more than smelling of blood in the water. In Chapter 14, he discusses the illusion of mysticism, in which something so clearly internationalized that almost imperceptibly small movements are incredibly powerful, as embodied in this quote from Wu Yu-hsing, writing in the nineteenth century: If a rival doesn't move, then I'm not moving. At the slightest turn of the opponent, I move first. A learning-centered view of intelligence means linking efforts to success through the learning and promotion process (32). In other words, genetics and raw talent can only get you so far before hard work has to pick up the slas (1. 00). Another useful lesson concerns the use of adversity (cf. p. 132-33). Weitzkin suggests using the problem in one area to adapt and strengthen other areas. I have a personal example to back this up. I will always regret dropping out of basketball in high school. I remember my sophomore year—my final year of play—I broke my thumb and instead of focusing on cardiovascular conditioning and other aspects of my game (like working with my left hand), I waited to recover before I got back to work. Waitzkin offers another useful chapter called time-slowing, in which he discusses ways to sharpen and harness intuition. He discusses the process of chunks, which cuts off problems into progressively larger problems until he does a complex set of calculations the same way, without having to think about it. His technical example of chess is particularly instructive in a footnote on page 143. Chess grandmaster has internationalized a lot about pieces and scripts; grandmaster can process much more information with less effort than an expert. Craftsmanship is the process of turning articulated into intuitive. There are many that will be familiar to people who read books such as the need to pace themselves, set clearly defined goals, the need to relax, techniques for getting into the zone and so on. Anecdotes beautifully illustrate his points. Throughout the book, he lays out his methodology for getting into the zone, another notion that people in a performance-based profession will find useful. He calls it a soft zone (Chapter 3), and it consists of flexibility, taxes and the ability to adapt to circumstances. Combat artists and David Allen Getting Started can recognize this as having a mind like water. It contrasts this with a hard zone that requires the cooperative world to function. Like a dry twig, you are brittle, ready to fix under pressure (1. 54). The soft zone is resilient, like a flexible blade of grass that can move with hurricane force winds and survive (December 19). Another illustration refers to making sandals if faced with a journey with a field of thorns (1, 55). No basis for success in the submissive world or overriding force, but intellectual training and cultivated resilience (tel. 55). A lot here will be familiar to creative people: you try to think, but this song that one band keeps blasting away in your head. Wejzkin's only option was to be at peace with the noise (December 19, 2016). The language of the economy contains restrictions; we don't get to choose them. This is explored in more detail in Chapter 16. He discusses top performers, Michael Jordan, Tiger Woods and others who are not obsessed with the latest setback and who know how to rest when they need to (179). Jim Harbaugh's NFL quarterfinal experience is also useful because the more he could let things go while the defense was on the field, the sharper he was in the next drive (179). Waitzkin discusses further things he learned during experiments in human performance, especially regarding cardiovascular interval workouts, which can have a profound effect on your ability to quickly release tension and recover from mental exhaustion (181). This latest notion to recover from mental exhaustion is most likely what most scientists need help with. There's a lot to do about pushing boundaries; However, you need to earn the right to do so: as Weitzkin writes, Jackson Pollock could paint like a camera, but instead he decided to spray paint in a wild manner that pulsed with emotion (ie. 85). This is another good lesson for scientists, managers and educators. Waitzken emphasizes close attention to detail when receiving instructions, especially from his Tai chi instructor William S.C.Chen. Tai Chi is not about offering resistance or strength, but about the ability to mingle with (the enemy's) energy, concede it, and overcome with softness (103). The book is littered with stories of people who have not reached their potential because they have not taken advantage of opportunities to improve or because they have refused to adapt to the conditions. This lesson is highlighted in Chapter 17, where he discusses making sandals when faced in a thorny way, such as an underrated competitor. The book offers several principles by which we can become better educators, scientists and managers. The celebration of results should be secondary to the celebration of who gave these results (1000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000 There is also a study in contrasts, starting from page 185, and this is what I am struggling to learn. Waitzkin points itself to the opportunity to relax between matches while some of his opponents have been under pressure to analyse their games between them. This leads to extreme mental fatigue: this tendency of competitors to exhaust themselves between rounds of tournaments is surprisingly widespread and very self-destructing (186). The art of learning has a lot to teach us, regardless of our industry. I found this particularly relevant given my chosen profession and my decision to start studying martial arts when I started teaching. The ideas are numerous and applicable, and the fact that Waitzkin has used the principles he now teaches to become a world-class competitor at two very demanding competitive businesses makes it much easier to read. I recommend this book to anyone in a position of leadership or in a position that requires extensive training and adaptation. That is, I recommend this book to everyone. More about trainingLaw photo credit: Jazmin Quaynor via unsplash.com unsplash.com

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