

How to focus without fixation on your company's goals



BLACK BELT TARGETING

Part 3 of The Order of Black Belt: Mastering the Practice of Growing a Company

By John Starling

When training students in the dojang, we often do a simple exercise early in their time with us that makes an indelible point. At our MMA (Mentoring and Martial Arts) school, students earn their belts through the combination of achieving proficiency in their chosen martial art and by achieving goals in their “life plan.” Having taught them a proper *stance*, we blindfold them and then hold a target in front of them and ask them to hit it. Of course, they cannot hit what they cannot see. Nor can we, as CEOs.

In order to see your targets well, your company should first be comfortable in its stance – your vision, mission, values and value proposition to the market should be clear – and standing from that level of clarity, you should be in a position to handle whatever comes your way. You *are* your stance, and from it, you can deliver whatever is needed to your customers (or competition) with grace and ease. If you see everything and everyone through the lens of your (and their) stance, you will see things very clearly, and clear goals will emerge in ways without precedent.

We all have goals. Some are spoken, some unspoken. For the most part, those that are spoken seem to stand a better chance of coming to fruition, so we ask students and CEOs alike to bring their goals into existence for themselves and others by declaring them. Simply put, we ask, “What is your outcome here?”

Speaking our goals to others creates an inherent accountability structure that is hard to later refute or step back from. Our word creates our world and also the world of the people around us. So when we speak our goals to our listening audiences, we set ourselves up to live into those goals and give others the chance to help us achieve them. Without verbalizing our goals, it’s hard for us (or anyone else) to see them. If we can’t see them, it’s hard to hit them.

Seeing our targets and hitting them: This is our practice. This is the order of black belt.

And then the blindfold comes off.

LOOKING NOWHERE AND EVERYWHERE

When the blindfold comes off, “the target” is instantly visible, and the immediate reaction is to strike at it, but we ask for patience here. Our students are taught to look “nowhere and everywhere.” If they get fixated on the target, maybe staring down into the opponent’s eyes, they lose sight of everything else around them and get hit from their blind spots. If they look everywhere, they lose sight of

the target and can’t hit it effectively.

Smart companies also learn to look nowhere and everywhere. It’s an important survival skill that some established companies pick up over the years and that many young companies would do well to understand early on. Seeing nowhere and everywhere is focus without fixation.

Finding the Ideal Customer: To a large extent, we get what we focus our efforts on, so bringing the ideal customer into focus is a huge step toward hitting your targets.

- Who are they?
- What industries are they in?
- Where are they located geographically?
- Where do they live online?
- Who are the recommenders, the champions and the decision-makers?
- What are the underlying issues they are facing and the pain points that drive them to action or the pleasures that entice them to step forward?

And at the same time, fixation on only this narrowly defined “A-client profile” limits possibility.

KNOWING ‘WHAT IS SO’

This is marketing: understanding the context in which we and the target are operating and, therefore, how and when to advance, to walk away, to attack, to defend, to neutralize, to analyze, to plan, to practice – to live to fight another day. It is important to understand this before you make a commitment that cannot be retracted. It is important to know “what is so.”

A few years back, my wife and I were walking to the subway very late at night in Seoul when a stranger approached us, extending his hand to shake mine. I stepped forward, instinctively putting myself between him and my wife and shook his hand. Like most people from Northeast Asia, he shook hands for what is, to most Westerners, an unusually long time. Still holding my hand (very tightly), he began speaking to me in English, then German, then Russian. I told him he was hurting my hand, to which he responded by cranking down on it even harder.

Before he knew what happened, I had “wrist-rolled” him, turned him around and firmly (but with no malice) bounced him

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Further Reading: Learn more about the fundamentals of growing a company – vision, mission, values and goals – and how to create your company’s “stance” in Parts 1 and 2 of John Starling’s series, “The Order of Black Belt: Mastering the practice of growing a company.” (February 2011 and June 2011).

off a pull-down metal door of one of the shops lining the street. He was smaller than me, about 10 years older and seemingly drunk, on some kind of drug or out of his mind, and I didn’t want to hurt him. As he gathered himself, I stepped back and warned him (which is required by law in Korea) that “I’m a Black Belt, and if you take another step I’m going to drop you.” He did (toward my wife) and I did – and as we left the scene for our train, two Seoul police officers, who had been watching the whole thing unfold, were reviving him.

When I got back to the U.S. from that trip abroad, I related the story to the Tai Chi Master I had been studying under in the months leading up to our vacation. Tai Chi is the very fluid, beautiful, moving meditation you see Chinese people doing in public parks in the movies. It’s like Kung Fu in slow motion, and I had no idea it had any martial application, but of all the things I could have done to that guy in that situation, I (subconsciously) chose Tai Chi.

When he stepped toward us, I tapped his solar plexus with the palm of my hand, quickly but gently, and he fell down as if he had been tasered. I was (almost) as stunned as he was, because for 30 years, “karate” to me meant kicking, punching, elbowing, supinating joints – even head-butting, or worse, if necessary. And in this particular situation, I basically just touched the guy and he went down cold.

I told the Tai Chi Master the story in order to sort it out in my own head. It was still baffling me. Being a practical practitioner, I wasn’t one for the hocus pocus of the martial arts. He listened and said, “It was perfect Tai Chi. Your *chi* (life energy and intent) created the outcome.

“Your energy was neutral. You didn’t want to hurt him, but you wouldn’t allow him to hurt her, so your touch was neutral and you neutralized him,” he said. “If you would have felt that he was going to try to kill her (or you), you would have killed him with the exact same strike, but that wasn’t so. What was so was that he just needed to be stopped.”

This is marketing.

DON’T MESS WITH THIS COMPANY

Where are you targeting your efforts and energy, and why? What’s your intent? What’s your outcome? To answer something as simple as “to make money” would be a pretense. Money is a pretense. Money is a measurement in business, and if you are successful, you will make money. What is your outcome? What do you want? What is *so* for you?

“At the center of your being, you have the answer; you know who you are, and you know what you want,” said the Chinese philosopher Lao Tzu. Envision, for a moment, a picture of a business leader and company with a clear vision and mission, with values that are present in the language and the life of the company, who articulates a value proposition to the market that is clear and compelling and declaring for itself goals without precedent. Envision a company that sees everything and everyone from that stance and that, standing from there, sees the market in terms of “nowhere and everywhere,” focusing without fixation on its targets. I would not mess with this company. **CEO**



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