

FULL CONTACT LIVING

PREPARING YOU FOR THE
MARTIAL ARTS OF EVERYDAY LIFE



BY RODNEY KING

Full-Contact Living

Preparing for the Martial Arts of Everyday Life!

By Rodney King

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Dedication

To my wife Louise, for listening to me endlessly talk about my dreams, and believing in my vision of teaching martial arts that transcends the fight. To my boys, Egan and Tobynn, for ensuring that I practice daily the lessons that are held within in this book. You rock!

Acknowledgements

Thank you to my friend Andrew Robertson for the amazing art in this book. To find out more about Andy's incredible work go to:

www.glyph.co.za

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Foreword

Christian de Quincey

One evening, a few years ago now, I got an email from someone I didn't know. He had found one of my books in a local bookstore in Johannesburg, and *just had to connect*. Apparently, he had randomly flipped open to a section where I had written about the mysterious mind-body connection, and he was astounded to find language that exactly matched what he had learned from direct embodied experience over the years as a martial artist.

That was how I first “met” Rodney King, martial artist coach extraordinaire and internationally successful entrepreneur. I immediately wrote back, and so began our regular correspondence, and a deep and lasting friendship.

At first, Rodney wanted me to mentor him in the ideas and language of “Consciousness Studies,” with special focus on the mind-body relationship—my field of scholarship for many years. I agreed, and so we moved to the next level, meeting weekly via Skype. The time difference between where I live (California) and his home (Johannesburg) meant the most convenient hour for us to talk was around 7:00 AM his time, 9:00 PM my time, a day earlier. It worked out just fine. For more than a year, Rodney and I explored the mysteries of mind-body through books, email exchanges, and websites. Rodney wrote

essays about what he had learned, and offered insights on how he would apply some of my ideas about the mind-body connection to his martial arts/leadership coaching practice—a great way to “embody” the new language and terminology he had now discovered. I gave feedback, and our rich dialogues deepened as we explored a common passion for integrating mind and body—conceptually and somatically through self-expressive action.

Martial Artist Meets Philosopher

About a year later, Rodney (a world-class martial arts coach) and I (author and philosopher) decided to work together—in archetypal terms: Warrior meets Sage. We co-authored a book, *Embodied-Mind Performance*, which summarized and clarified the philosophical foundations for Crazy Monkey Defense, a unique form of martial arts created by Rodney, and now offered in fifteen countries around the world.

Based on our collaboration, we decided to host a series of “Embodied-Mind” workshops, starting in South Africa, later in the U.S. and Australia. So I flew to Johannesburg, my first visit to Southern Africa. I finally got to meet Rodney in person; it felt like reuniting with a brother, and time to switch roles. I now became his student as he taught me the fundamentals of his style of martial arts. This was a perfect opportunity for me to put into practice, *literally*, ideas I had been thinking and writing about for decades. Whereas Rodney came to me for words to put to consciousness, and mind-body

interaction, I came to him for the pragmatic embodied experience of putting mind-body unity into action.

Like many people interested in exploring consciousness, I have meditated for many years—a worthy practice for learning to observe the flux and flow of the mind. I have written and lectured on the value of mindfulness—being fully present and aware of whatever is happening in your mind-body *as it happens*.

Sparring with Rodney on the mat in his home studio, however, I got a lesson in the difference between mindfulness sitting on a cushion and *mindfulness-in-action*. It's one thing to achieve a level of peaceful, non-judgmental, non-reactive self-observation during meditation; it is altogether something else to maintain such presence of mind when someone (stronger and bigger than you) is throwing punches at your face. Even though I knew he had no intention of hurting me, my body still tensed and flinched as his glove glanced across my cheek. Here, I had an opportunity to face my fears and pay closer attention to how my mind reacts to what happens in my body, and how my body reacts to thoughts and emotions zipping through my mind.

This is what Rodney calls “the mental game”—developing a disciplined presence of mind in the face of *whatever* challenges rise before you. This could be while sparring in a martial arts dojo, negotiating an important business deal in a corporate boardroom, pursuing law-enforcement on city streets, or fighting on a modern battlefield.

While Rodney pays a great deal of attention to the power of the mind in martial arts (and in everyday life), this is never at the expense of honoring the power and natural intelligence of the body itself. Whereas most modern martial artists and coaches focus on training the *body*, Rodney's approach emphasizes disciplined mental training, viewing it just as, if not more, crucial for achieving peak performance—*in anything*.

Rodney is committed to martial arts as a way of life—a way of life that aims at holistic self-development and enrichment. This doesn't just involve training aimed at achieving a degree of mastery in a particular skill, embodied or mental, but also crucially involves attending to the quality of our *relationships*—with other people and with the wider world around us.

As you will discover in the following pages, Rodney King is no ordinary leadership coach. His unorthodox view of martial arts as a way to enrich our performance in everyday life, as well as on the mat, has earned him the tag “Anti-Tough Guy” by some of his cage-fighting contemporaries in the field of mixed martial arts (MMA).

His passion for taking in the bigger picture—honoring the wisdom of ancient philosophers such as Marcus Aurelius, and spiritual sages such as the Buddha, Krishnamurti, and Thich Nhat Hanh—and for acknowledging the importance of Warrior ethics and values, Rodney is viewed both as a hero and a villain by different groups.

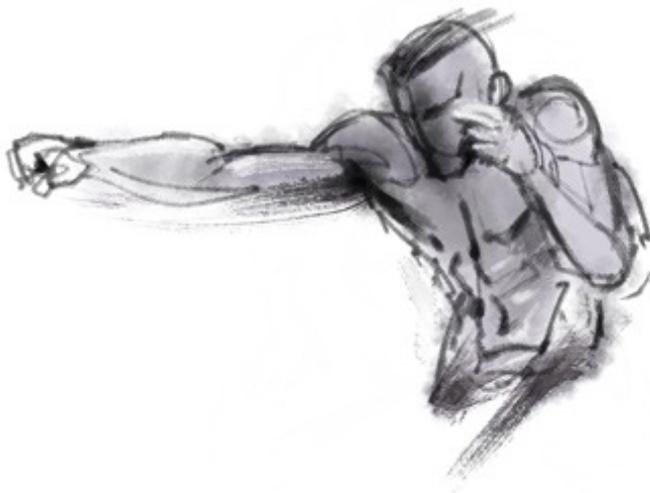
But, as you will also learn in these pages, developing the “mental game” is not for sissies or wimps. On the contrary, it takes courage, self-discipline, and long hours of often grueling practice to take on the task of training your “Inner Warrior.” Having superior martial arts skills helps too, of course.

After decades coaching thousands of others on how to improve their “game,” Rodney has developed a six-step system for training and applying the “secrets” of mind-body peak performance to leadership, in fields as diverse as sports, law-enforcement, security, and business. In Rodney’s hands, martial arts’ training becomes *performance* training, applicable in just about any situation that requires quick-reactions, a clear mind, managed emotions, and a mind-body unity ready and willing to respond to any challenge.

Half Moon Bay, California
January, 2015

Part 1

Getting Tough



Preface

Until my late 20s, I felt like I had been fighting my whole life. Brought up on the south side of Johannesburg, in South African government housing (similar to “the projects” in the USA), I learned early on that what really mattered was not how smart you were, but whether you were tough enough. Growing up, I often felt trapped in a really bad nightmare—and I wanted to wake up.

But tough times build strong character, and I was determined to survive the school bullies and the mean streets of my neighborhood. That’s how I discovered martial arts, and set the course for the rest of my life. If I hadn’t started training in karate and boxing, I wouldn’t be standing today in front of business leaders, entrepreneurs, and other success-minded people . . . coaching them on how to tap into their inner game.

Things turned rough in my teens. My abusive, alcoholic mother kicked me out of the house at 17 and, as a result, I never finished high school. I found myself sleeping on the streets with less than \$20 in my pocket—yet today I consult with leaders of industry, train top security forces, and run my own international business. Martial arts taught me to be resilient, to embrace my fears, to develop laser-like focus, and to never give up. Having developed those qualities (*I had to!*), I went back to school, put myself through college, and am currently completing my Ph.D in Embodied Leadership. Over the years, I have taught special-force military operators and law enforcement officers how to

develop an unstoppable mind, needed for success on the battlefield, or on city streets, and how to survive when all else fails.

You see, I did wake up from that nightmare. What I learned on the mat as a martial artist, helped me not only take on those tough, mean streets of Johannesburg, but it empowered me to take on *life*, full throttle, and to succeed.

What I learned, and what I teach my clients today, may surprise you. Being tough is not about aggression, violence, or killer instinct. In fact, everything I teach is the complete opposite: it's about having a Buddha mind, and a Warrior body—Zen in the midst of chaos. Most important it works! It worked for me, and it works for my clients not only on the dojo floor, but in their lives and careers.

What follows is the story of the hard-learned lessons that not only taught me to become a successful martial artist, coach, and entrepreneur—but also enabled my clients to successfully take on “the martial arts of everyday life.” The techniques that I coach, not only enhance performance in a fight, but also enable my clients to perform at their best in all aspects of life.

My motto has always been: “Performance is performance”—meaning it doesn't matter whether it is in the ring where “performance” shows up as self-defense, or on the street, or in the boardroom during tough negotiations, or, indeed, at home dealing with

everyday domestic challenges (I now often find myself negotiating with my thirteen-year-old son).

The ingredients for successful performance—in *all areas of life*—transcend the situation. The “inner tools” that shape success are perennial and universal. That’s what I discovered as I struggled to survive on the mean streets, and then developed into a system to help myself and my clients thrive, as we face the inevitable challenges of today’s competitive world.

—**Rodney King M.A. RSME**
Johannesburg, 2014

Introduction

In *Full-Contact Living*, I share six principles that have helped shape my success—not only on the mat as a martial artist, but in life. Over the years I’ve learned that it’s not what we do on the outside that matters most; it’s how well we manage who we are on the inside. This insight is central to my approach to martial arts, life and leadership coaching. Baseball legend Yogi Berra quipped: “Ninety percent of the game is half mental.” I guess he was saying that being great at anything comes down to how well you win the battles inside your mind. The big question, of course, is how do you actually make that happen? How do you build the inner game for success?

I developed the following life-changing principles over almost three decades of martial arts practice, through coaching thousands of people on the mat, surviving thousands of rounds of sparring, and through several years working as security outside the roughest nightclubs in Johannesburg. No one ever taught me these principles directly. I discovered them the hard way: Repeatedly facing life-threatening situations, and realizing I had to out-perform my adversaries, or suffer the consequences. I quickly learned that my greatest strength was: *Understanding myself*. It didn’t happen all at once, though. I cultivated a persistent attitude of wanting to truly understand how my mind and body function together in moments of crisis.

I was determined to discover what happens *on the inside*, trying to figure out how on one day I was able to operate at full-tilt, one-hundred percent, in the zone — yet the very next day I found myself choking? The result of this personal inner research, you now hold in your hands. I believe anyone can apply these principles to achieve sustained peak performance—not only on the mat, but in the rest of life.

I use these principles personally, daily, whenever I find myself out of my comfort zone, for example standing in front of a room of strangers having to present a lecture or give a demonstration. From direct personal experience, I know these principles work, and I have taught them to special force operators, where making a mistake means paying the ultimate price.

The main message about my life that I want to convey in this book is simple enough: *Success in full-contact living is an inside job!* That's it in a nutshell. Yes, I've had great success sparring in dojos around the world (and I don't ever want to diminish the satisfaction that brings); but by far the greatest reward is how well I perform in what I call *the martial arts of everyday life*.

Right up-front, I want to be honest about this: While the six principles I cover in this book do really *work*, they are not the only path to peak performance. However, they do lay a solid foundation for an embodied philosophy, and a special kind of awareness that

can lead to a more sustained, and consistent performance—in any of life’s challenges that involve mastery of the mind-body connection.

My goal for this book; is to weave practical know-how and personal narrative into a valuable “manual for life,” that readers can use to help them improve their “game”—however they define it for themselves. As a side note, my friend and student Andy Robertson, who did all the wonderful artwork for this book, has told me that training on the mat, and embodying the six principles, has made him a better artist.

This book, then, tells the story of my own journey as a martial artist, and summarizes the important life lessons I have learned along the way—lessons that have positively informed and transformed my life inside and outside the dojo. While the following pages offer a self-help guide for martial artists, seeking to enhance their performance on the mat or in the ring, they also offer a helping hand to anyone who struggles with the martial arts of everyday life.

Steps to Success

The six big ideas outlined in this book, will help you achieve optimal success in virtually any performance environment—whether you want to improve your sparring game, climb a rock face, surf a monster wave, sky dive or deep dive, sail over the horizon, defend your neighborhood or country, protect your family . . . in short, to get the most

out of your career and life. In fact, you could think of this book as a manual for how to “hack” your life for peak performance.

Although I’ve organized this book around the six prime principles for achieving peak performance, no single idea works on its own. All six principles are interconnected. You need to understand and apply them all, in order to be truly successful. If you are musically inclined, you could view these principles as notes in a symphony—each individual note is essential, but the power of the music comes from how well the notes work together. In the same way, each principle is essential for success; but how you integrate them in your life, determines how well you will succeed.

I recommend first reading this book cover to cover, and then, once you know and understand the material, feel free to come back and dive in as you need to, from time to time.

To help you get started, and to orient you on your journey, the following outline of the book will serve as your guide—your “map to success.”

Back-story: Martial Arts Saved My Life

Literally, adversity built the courage and determination I needed to be successful as a martial artist, entrepreneur, and a dad. This chapter gives you a glimpse into my life growing up, and will set the tone for the rest of the book.

The Language of Embodiment

You will find some really big ideas in this book. I want to present them in a way that not only makes them accessible, but also doesn't "dumb" them down. This chapter explains key terminology used throughout this book. Since some of the ideas might be new to you, reading this quick guide will help you make sense of the core ideas. While I take philosophy seriously, I have tried to make unfamiliar words easy to understand. This is essentially my life story and a manual for peak performance—it is not intended as an academic treatise. In fact, I'm aware that some of the key ideas covered here are still hotly debated. Feel free to alter and adapt them for your own use.

Principle 1: The *Wabi-Sabi* of Peak Performance

Naturally, we want everything to be perfect in life. However, as the French philosopher Voltaire wisely observed: "Perfection is the enemy of the good." Or, as Confucius said: "Better a diamond with a flaw than a pebble without." My version: "*Perfection is the enemy of success.*"

You will never achieve your goals as long as you hold out for perfection. I learned an important lesson early on: While you wait for things to be *just right*, life happens around you, and you miss most of it. John Lennon said something similar: "Life is what happens while you are busy making other plans." The sooner you come to grips with this, the sooner you can achieve personal success. In Japanese, this idea is captured in

the phrase “*wabi-sabi*”—which, loosely translated, means something like “the perfection of imperfection.” In this chapter, we will explore the paradox of imperfection needed for perfect peak performance.

Principle 2: Buddha Mind, Warrior Body

Thinking isn't inherently bad, but what you focus on can be. Reflecting on past mistakes and planning for the future, are crucial for long-term achievement. But when it comes to performance in the moment, where it matters most, past and future can get you into trouble. When your thoughts wander away from the present moment, you can easily get caught up in a mental vortex, spin out of control, and lose touch with the reality of what is *actually happening*. The present moment is the only time you can ever take action. That's why mental clarity in the *present moment* is crucial for taking action that leads to success. However, being fully present and aware can be hard work because so much of what goes on around us in the media, in education, in society in general, snatches our attention away from us, slinging our thoughts into the past or the future. In this chapter, I will show you how to achieve more focus in the midst of life's chaos.

Principle 3: Body Attitude Matters

How you hold your body not only changes your physiology, it also changes how you think and feel. How you show up in the world matters more than you think. Scientists have discovered that some very simple gestures, such as how you shape your mouth, can

affect your mental attitude. Bottom line: Although our minds and bodies are different, they always go together. What happens in your body affects what happens in your mind—and vice versa. In this chapter, I will introduce you to *body attitude*, and why it is essential for peak performance in any endeavor.

Principle 4: Surf the Edge of Chaos

This chapter introduces you to the power of *mindfulness in action*—how to “surf the edge of chaos,” or, as my kid says, “live like a boss” (meaning “master what you do in life”). Mindfulness is a state of being, where you are able to just *be present* without judging the outcome of your performance. It involves not becoming attached to what you are thinking, or getting hooked to your emotions or bodily sensations. When you can master your mind by being *present as the observer* of your thoughts and feelings, you develop what I call *having a fluid mind*. Mindfulness is crucial when dealing with difficult emotions and thoughts. Sounds like something we all need, right? However, for mindfulness to be truly effective, you have to be able to apply it in action, not just sitting on a cushion in meditation.

Principle 5: Exhale—Take Charge of Your Breath

Breathing isn't just something you do to stay alive. *How you breathe* also affects *how you act*. More and more, medical science reveals how emotions such as fear and aggression are responsible for many modern-day maladies, including anxiety and

hypertension. As you will see in this chapter, these emotions kick in when our sympathetic nervous system gets activated. It's called the "fight or flight" response, which is still a key area of medical research. One thing we already know for sure: the sympathetic nervous system is intimately connected to how we breathe. When fear or aggression erupts in our system, we automatically tend to hold our breath, and our breathing becomes shallow and irregular. This is a striking example of the mind-body connection. The good news: It works both ways. By consciously taking charge of how we breathe, we can change how our nervous system works. Some simple techniques can make a big difference whenever negative emotions dominate our state of mind. One of the simplest is to simply *exhale* forcefully and *breathe in* deeply. Believe it or not, learning how to take charge of your breathing can work wonders in all kinds of performance. It's like learning how to speak to your nervous system.

Principle 6: Roll with the Punches

The ability to bounce back from setbacks is the mark of a true peak performer. However, resilience takes work. This chapter teaches you how to cultivate greater resilience, by embracing more challenges in life, and by learning how to "play the game" in ways that can turn adversity into opportunity. Although this is Principle # 6, in some ways, it is the first one I ever learned. As you will see from my life story, I had plenty of adversity to contend with in my youth. But something in me pushed me to rise to the occasion, and despite mistakes and setbacks, to never give up. I learned to "roll with the punches,"

both literally and metaphorically. Resilience is a keystone of success—however that shows up in your life.

The Meta-Principle: Become an IGAMER

I conclude this book by summarizing and integrating the *Six Principles of Peak Performance* into a “meta” principle—one overarching principle I call “IGAMER.” Don’t worry what that acronym means—it will all become clear by the end of the book. For now, you just need to know that the secret to “full-contact living” is to cultivate your own IGAMER approach to life. This book shows you how.