

# Limits

Business



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

My hands were sweaty and I could feel the polished wood getting slippery under my tight grip. I clutched the six-foot-long staff even tighter and I gritted my teeth, willing myself not to let go. “ Alright,” my teacher, Beth, said slowly. “ Now I want you to do the two-handed upward flower.

” I could almost feel my heart drop to my stomach. This was easily one of the hardest martial arts techniques for me, and here I was being tested on it. Beth stared at me intently with those hawk-like gray eyes of hers, patiently waiting for me to begin. She was a black-belt in several different styles of martial arts, and she had been my teacher for quite a while, helping me along through the ranks. But now that I had reached a high enough belt level to be working with weapon techniques, she expected a lot from me, and I felt I couldn’t give it. I took a deep breath.

I used both my hands to grasp the staff in the middle and held it out in front of me like I was gripping the handlebars of a bike. Already my arms were shaking slightly from the mere weight of the staff. It was extremely heavy, so it was already a big enough test just for me to hold it with my weak arms. Couple that with the fact that it was slippery and hard to grip, and I had a real challenge on my hands. But that wasn’t all.

The hardest part was the fact that I was supposed to spin this gigantic thing in fast, fluid movements around my body without hitting myself, just like those kung fu masters do in old martial arts movies. If I went too fast, it would be easy for me to lose control of the staff or for it to slip out of my hands. If this happened, it would most definitely hit me right in the head. This super-heavy and thick piece of wood will be spinning at a speed that

turned it into a brownish blur. If it hit my head, I would not only knock myself out, but I could end up with some pretty bad head damage.

If I spun it slowly, its weight would overcome its momentum and it would turn at an angle and come in direct contact with my face, which would also have unpleasant results. I had been doing martial arts since I had learned how to walk, along with dance and gymnastics, but ever since my teacher had told me that I had to move onto the competitive weapons category to reach the higher ranks of the martial arts world, I felt smaller and weaker than ever before. The task at hand was more challenging than the balance beam, required more balance than a pirouette or a fouette. The staff in my hands mocked me and tormented me. It represented something I felt I was too weak and too afraid to do.

Yet, if I wanted to improve, I had to master its use. But there was no room for mistakes or indecision. I couldn't let my teacher force me to do it. I had to learn to force myself. I took in another deep breath, a little slower this time, and glared grudgingly at the piece of wood in my hands. I was no doubt afraid of it hitting me, and the more I thought about it, the more I realized it was very likely to happen after I began to spin it.

Could I get over this shaky fear? Just do it, I told myself silently. It's now or never. I had watched Beth do it at least a hundred times, gracefully and powerfully. I knew what it was supposed to look like, from start to finish. I had studied the form and technique, and now it was time to execute it. I swallowed the lump in my throat and nervously willed my wrist to flick into a twisting motion, causing the heavy staff to instantly start spinning.

Mind over matter, I thought to myself. My hands were capable of wielding the staff, and my body was capable of avoiding getting hit by it. If I could just get my mind past the fear, I knew I would be okay. The staff began to spin faster and faster. To my teacher and my fellow students, it looked like a blur.

To me, it was as if time itself had slowed down. Every second felt like an eternity. I saw ends of the staff slowly passing my face and passing so dangerously close to my body that I felt it rustle the fabric of my practice uniform. I could feel it vibrating through the tips of my fingers. I could hear it now too— the staff made a soft and whistle-like humming noise as it spun through the air.

I felt its weight shifting and moving between my hands like an invisible force, like playing with a magnet. I let my muscles relax a bit and watched the center of the staff carefully, trusting my arms to know where they were guiding it. While it was still spinning, I passed it around my body and switched it from hand to hand, behind my back, and over my head like pair of helicopter blades. The humming grew louder and steadier as I got used to controlling the speed and momentum as it sliced through the air around me. And then, quickly so I wouldn't miss it, I roughly flicked my wrist once more and let the bottom tip of the staff lightly tap the ground as it came to a sudden halt in my hands. I could hear my pulse in my ears and felt the thumping in my chest.

I felt the last bit of adrenaline leave my system. It was finished. I overcame my fear. I was past the danger. Somehow, I had done it.

All I had to do was relax and just let it happen. I had officially mastered the way of the stick. Afterwards, I remember recalling one of my favorite quotes: “ The only limitations in life are the ones you put on yourself.” I now understood the meaning of the quote. It described my situation perfectly.

I now apply that quote to everything I do. If I hadn't felt I could do it, then I couldn't have done it. Simple. I can't remember who said that wonderful quote, but either way, I think they were definitely right.