

Why we should avoid Egotism

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Egotism is "characterized by an exaggerated estimate of one's intellect, ability, importance, appearance, wit, or other valued personal characteristics"[1] – the drive to maintain and enhance favorable views of oneself.

"In egotism we find the person filled with an overweening sense of the importance and qualities of his personality...the things of the 'Me.'"[2] Egotism means placing oneself at the center of one's world with no concern for others, including those loved or considered as "close," in any other terms except those set by the egotist. (Wikipedia)

In martial arts this can be a slippery slope. In life, it is a recipe for disaster. When we train, we develop more confidence as a result of attaining greater knowledge and greater skill; this increased confidence is a good thing, as long as it is kept in check with humility. Without humility, the ego can inflate and this can lead the student down the wrong path, regardless of rank. The high rank and low rank are susceptible to the influence of overabundant ego, or egotism.

Egotism can manifest in small ways, such as throwing one's weight around at junior ranking classmates, or larger ones, like second guessing an instructor, or even correcting them during class. Both of these behaviors are bad and lack humility. As higher ranking students, we are obligated to help our juniors on their journey, and create a helpful and supportive environment. To make them feel inferior, or to boss them around is not the Chayon-Ryu way. Likewise, as instructors, we must never overstep into the private lives of students, and assume authority to order students about outside the context of a student/teacher relationship. It is our responsibility to prepare the young birds to fly from the nest and be able to stand on their own.

As juniors, we must show our seniors and instructors respect at all times. No matter what we were taught previously, we must respect the teacher who stands at the head of the class and not show disrespect, or insubordination. Be humble, be serious. We must never believe that we know more than the person standing to our right.

Outside the dojang, we must all remember to balance ego with humility as well, or we run the risk of becoming narcissistic and overblown with self-importance. No one wants to deal with this kind of person, at work, at school, on a sports team, in traffic or even in line at the coffee shop. The ego unchecked can create a monster within us. It is even possible for some individuals to develop into bullies, or abusers. To avoid this pitfall, we must look to the lessons of Chayon-Ryu to direct us to a place of peace and enlightenment. Grandmaster Kim Soo has given us the tools to navigate life without falling into the trap of egotism, and we must look to his teaching and example to be our compass. These great gifts are his legacy to us all, if we are open to receiving them.

It is good to develop confidence and to feel good about our achievements. But we must never let our ego overrun our good sense, and basic principles of right and wrong. Balance the ego with humility. Be humble and serious in training. Apply Chayon-Ryu principles to everyday living, and seek the path to enlightenment and self-awareness. When we are self-aware, we are aware of how our words and actions affect those around us.