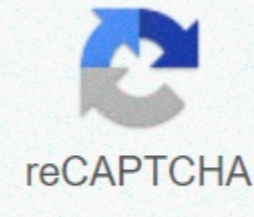




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Last updated on March 17, 2020 Josh Waitzkin has led a full life as a chess master and international martial arts champion, and this writing as he is not yet 35. The Art of Learning: An Internal Journey from Chess Prodigy to Optimal Performance To Tai Chi Chuan with his travel history (and the subject of the film searching for Bobby Fischer) identified important lessons and explained along the way. Marketing expert Seth Godin wrote and said that one should resolve to change three things as a result of reading a business book; The reader will receive many lessons in the amount of Waitzkin. Waitzkin has a list of theories that appear throughout the book, but it's not always clear exactly what theories are and how they tie together. It doesn't really hurt the readability of the book, though, and it's at best a little inconvenience. There are many lessons for the teacher or leader, and as one who teaches college, was president of the chess club in middle school, and about two years ago who started studying martial arts, I found the book fascinating, edifying, and instructive. Waitzkin's chess career began among hustlers of Washington Square in New York, and he learned to focus among such noise and distractions. The experience taught him to play aggressive chess as well as the importance of endurance from the cage players as well as to interact with them. He was discovered in Washington Square by chess teacher Bruce Pandolphi, who became his first coach and developed him into one of the best young players in the world with a prodigious talent. The book presents waitzkin's life as a study into contradictions; Perhaps it has deliberately given Waitzkin's acknowledged fascination with Eastern philosophy. Among the most useful lessons is the park's aggression concern of chess players and young prodigy who brought their queens into action early or who set detailed traps and then pounced on opponents' mistakes. These are excellent ways to send increasingly vulnerable players, but it doesn't build endurance or skill. He contrasts these approaches with attention to detail that leads to real mastery in the long run. According to Waitkin, an unfortunate reality in chess and martial arts—and perhaps in detail in education—is that people learn many superficial and sometimes impressive moves and techniques without developing a subtle, subtle command of fundamental principles. Tricks and traps can affect reliable (or vanquished), but they are of limited utility against someone who really knows what he is doing. Strategies that rely on early checkmates are likely to falter against players who can deflect attacks and get one in a long mid-game. Smashing inferior players with four-step checkmates is superficially satisfying, but it does Better for a game. He offers a kid as an anecdote who won many games against inferior opposition but who refused to embrace real challenges, clearly settling for a long string of victories over inferior players (pp. 36-37). It reminds me of the advice I got from a friend recently: always try to make sure you're the dumbest person in the room so you're always learning. Many of us, though, draw our self-worth by having big fish in small ponds. Waitzkin's discussions cast chess as an intellectual boxing match, and they are particularly appropriate given their discussion of martial arts later in the book. Those familiar with boxing will recall Muhammad Ali's tactics against George Foreman in the 1970s: Foreman was a heavy hitter, but he had never been in a long contest before. Ali won his rope with a dope tactic, patiently absorbing the foreman's jab and waiting for the foreman to exhaust himself. His lesson from chess is apt (p 34-36) as he discusses promising young players who focus more intensely on winning fast rather than developing their game. Waitzkin builds on these stories and contributes to our understanding of learning in chapter two by discussing unit and incremental approaches to learning. Unit theorists believe that things are innate; Thus, one can play chess or do karate or be an economist because he was born to do so. So, failure is very personal. On the contrary, incremental theorists see the disadvantage as opportunities: step by step, incrementally, the novice can become a master (P30). They rise to the occasion when presented with hard content as their approach is oriented towards some mastering over time. Unit theorists fall under pressure. Waitzkin contrasts his approach, in which he spent a lot of time dealing with end-game strategies where both players had very few pieces. On the contrary, he said many young students start by learning a wide array of opening variations. It damaged their game in the long run: (M) expect any very talented kids to win without much resistance. When the game was a struggle, they weren't emotionally prepared. For some of us, pressure becomes a source of paralysis and mistakes are the beginning of a downward spiral (pp 60, 62). As Waitzkin argues, though, if we reach our full potential a different approach is necessary. A deadly drawback of shock and awe, blitzkrieg's approach to chess, martial arts, and ultimately anything that has to be learned can be learned from rote everything. Waitzkin martial arts practitioners who become form collectors with fancy kicks and twirls that have absolutely no martial value (p 117). One can say the same thing about problem sets. It's not the fundamentals to achieve — Waitzkin's focus in Tai Chi was to refine something Theory (P117)-But there is a profound difference between technical proficiency and true understanding. Knowing tricks is one thing, but knowing how to determine what to do next. Waitzkin's intense focus on sophisticated fundamentals and procedures meant he remained strong in the later stages while his opponents withered. His approach to martial arts is summarized in this passage (P123): I condensed the mechanics of my body into a powerful state, while most of my opponents had large, elegant and relatively impractical performances. The fact is that when there is intense competition, those who succeed have a slightly more reputable skill than the rest. It's rarely a mysterious technique that drives us to the top, but rather a deep mastery of what might well be a basic skill set. Depth beats the width on any day of the week, because it opens a channel to abstract, unconscious, creative components of our hidden potential. This smell in water is much more than blood. In Chapter 14, he discusses the illusion of the mystic, making something so clearly internal that the almost inconspicuous small movements are incredibly powerful as embodied in this quote from Wu Yu-Hsiang, writing in the nineteenth century: if the opponent does not move forward, I do not move. On the steps from the opponent's slightest, I go first. A learning-focused approach of intelligence means associating efforts with success through the process of instruction and encouragement (p 32). In other words, genetics and raw talent only have to take slack (p 37) for hard work before you can get it so far. Another useful lesson relates to the use of adversity (cf. pp. 132-33). Waitzkin suggests using an issue in one area to customize and strengthen other areas. I have a personal example to back this up. I would always regret quitting basketball in high school. I remember my sophomore year — playing my last year — I broke my thumb and, instead focused on cardiovascular conditioning and other aspects of my game (such as working with my left hand), I waited to recover before I got back to work. Waitzkin offers another useful chapter entitled Slow Time in which he discusses ways to sharpen and exploit intuition. He discusses the chunking process, which is progressively dividing problems into big problems until one silences a complex set of calculations, without thinking about it. His technical example from chess is particularly instructive in the footnote on page 143. A chess grandmaster has done a lot internally about pieces and scenarios; Grandmaster can process a much higher amount of information with less effort than an expert. Mastery is the process of expressing in intuitive. There's a lot that's familiar to people who read books like this will, will, As yourself needs speed, to set clearly defined goals, the need to rest, the technique for getting into the field, and so forth. In anecdotes, he explains his words beautifully. Throughout the book, he gives his methodology for getting into the field, another concept that will find people useful in performance-based. He calls it soft zone (chapter three), and is able to be flexible, reprehensible and suited to circumstances. Marshall artists and devotees of David Allen getting things to be identified as having to mind it like a water. He contrasts to this to act hard areas, which demands a cooperative world for you. Like a dry twig, you are brittle, ready to snap under pressure (p 54). The soft zone is flexible, like a flexible blade of grass that can move along and survive storm force winds (P-54). Another example refers to making sandals if one is confronted with a trip to the area of thorns (P55). Neither base is success on a humble world or vigorous force, but on intelligent preparation and farming flexibility (page 55). Here will be very familiar to creative people: You're trying to think, but that a song by a band keeps blasting away in your head. Waitzkin's only option was to become at peace with the noise (p 56). In the language of economics, obstacles are given; We don't get to choose them. It is explored in more detail in Chapter 16. He discusses the top performers, Michael Jordan, Tiger Woods, and others who don't have passion over past failure and who know how to relax when they need to (p.179). NFL quarterback Jim Harbaugh's experience is also useful as and he could let things go while the defense was on the field, the quickest he was in the next drive (p.179). Waitzkin further discusses the things he learned while experimenting in human performance, particularly in relation to cardiovascular interval training, which could have a profound impact on his ability to quickly release stress and recover from mental exhaustion (p 181). It's that ultimate concept — to overcome mental exhaustion — it's likely that most academics need help with that. There's a lot here about pushing boundaries; However, one should earn the right to do so: As Waitzkin writes, Jackson pollock could draw like a camera, but instead he chose to splatter colors in a wild way that repulsed with emotions (p.85). This is another good lesson for academics, managers and teachers. Waitzkin emphasizes close attention to detail when receiving instruction, especially his Tai Chi instructor William C. from C Chen. Tai Chi is not about offering resistance or force, but about the ability to mix with (an opponent's) energy, yield to it, Away with tenderness (P 103). The book is littered with stories of people who didn't reach their potential because they didn't seize opportunities to improve or because they refused to adapt to conditions. This lesson is emphasized in Chapter 17, where he discusses making sandals when confronted with a thorny path, such as an underhand competitor. The book offers many principles by which we can become better teachers, scholars, and managers. Celebrating results should be secondary to celebrate processes producing those results (PP 45-47). There is also a study into the contradictions starting on page 185, and this is something I have struggled to learn. Waitzkin points himself in the tournament to being able to rest between matches while some of his opponents were pressured to analyze their game in between. This leads to extreme mental fatigue: this trend of competitors to exhaust themselves between tournament rounds is surprisingly wide and very self-destructive (p 186). The art of learning has a lot to teach us regardless of our area. I found it particularly relevant given my chosen profession and my decision to start studying martial arts when I started teaching. The insights are many more applicable, and the fact that Waitzkin has used the principles he now teaches to become a world-class competitor in two very demanding competitive enterprises makes it that much easier to read. I recommend this book to anyone in a position of leadership or in a position that requires extensive learning and adaptation. That is to say, I recommend this book to everyone. More about LearningFeatured Photo Credit: jazmin Quaynor via unsplash.com unsplash.com