

Leif Becker: Breaking Barriers

with Holistic Martial Arts

By Nancy Cohen

There are many ways to effect meaningful change and shape personal destiny, yet it can often feel difficult to know where to begin. In 2004, martial artist Master Leif Becker tied the world record in fastest board breaking by splitting 415 in a minute. He set the world record in 2005 by breaking 487. Leif's martial arts career has taught him lessons in transcending emotional and physical limitations and actualizing personal potential. Understanding the power of training body, mind, and spirit to perform what once seemed impossible, he continues setting new goals and works to help others break barriers to their own personal and/or professional achievement.

Leif's focus is on the martial art of Tang Soo Do, which aims at developing and unifying body, mind and spirit for success. "Tang" refers to China's Tang Dynasty, reflecting the shared cultural background between China and Korea (617-907 AD). "Soo" means hand and "Do" means way of life or art. The practice involves not only understanding the right way to execute physical techniques, but how to act and react in situations, and build the strength of character and conscience to lead a virtuous, balanced life. Practitioners discern their strengths and weaknesses, face fears, and eliminate limiting obstacles.

Leif integrates these concepts into his work helping people accomplish their objectives. Breaking, whether of boards or stuck patterns, is a manifestation of the ability to

dig deep and overcome barriers from personal defense mechanisms. He believes everyone has "Barrier Thoughts," self-talk that limits actions and strengthens obstacles. Examples include "I Don't...," "Yeah, but...," and "What if...?" Don't have time? Money? Knowledge? Leif asserts peak performers understand the limitations of "Barrier Thoughts" and succeed by countering and replacing them with two affirmations: I can; and, I am. They realize their strengths, conditioning themselves with daily reminders that motivate them to actions toward success. He further states what we tell ourselves is important. "Never use words to knock yourself down over a failure. Don't even use the failure word. Instead, tell yourself that you did not get the result you wanted. That's all. And then go about setting yourself up to succeed."

According to Leif, Breaking has always been part of the martial arts, and is not about developing physical force. Rather, it's about overcoming obstacles and surmounting limitations of the mind. People preparing to "break" enter a state in which they connect with—and balance—body, mind and spirit. When the body is trained to be in better condition, it experiences changes in flexibility, coordination, endurance, and strength, thereby increasing technical competence and physical health. Physical well-being helps increase mental focus. Clearly envisioning dreams or goals, and how they will

"It's not who you are that holds you back. It's who you think you're not."

Author Unknown

be actualized, creates discipline for achievement. Meditation and breath control relax the mind and strengthen the spirit, thereby increasing confidence, courage, humility, and even compassion.

A 4th degree Master Black Belt, Leif began his martial arts training in the late 1980's in a local park and recreation program. In the early 1990's he trained under Master Warren Adams at Adam's Karate Academy in Waterbury. He attended Keene State College, where he was president of the martial arts club. After school, he continued his training under Master John St. James. In 1998, Leif returned to his hometown of Southbury and opened Southbury Academy of Karate. Southbury Academy trains martial artists ages four through adult in Tang Soo Do. Programs include team and

self-confidence building exercises, self-defense, leadership skills, discipline, and goal setting. Group and individual training packages are offered. The intention is to allow students to reach their full potential in all areas of life. Teachings include setting measurable and specific steps toward goals. Learning techniques creates certainty in the action, which, in turn, increases momentum. This is exemplified in the different belt levels of martial arts, which monitor how practitioners get to each level, as well as the manner in which Leif went from breaking a small number of boards to setting his world record.

Leif travels the world sharing his passion for the martial arts and peak performance training, teaching skills for anyone to reach desired goals. He recently authored a book, *Breaking Barriers: Your Guide to Personal Mastery*, and offers talks about responsibility, character, stress, priority management, and the necessity of work/life balance. A pine board, which seminar participants actually learn to break, is used as a metaphor for overcoming fear. Believing "champions are those who create strong action in their lives," Leif suggests anyone can begin their self-empowering journey by simply answering the question "What action will you be taking today?"

To learn more about Master Becker, visit: www.LeifBecker.com. For more about Southbury Academy of Karate, visit www.southburykarate.com.