

Wolfpack or Tigers: Use personality typing to be a more effective student and/or teacher. By Dona Marie de Girau, Ansteorra

Before we get into the class part of this class, we're all going to take a personality quiz.
(everyone stand on one side of the room and take one step forward if)

If contests such as Spelling Bees or Math Races help you
to remember new information faster . . .

If losing one of these contests makes you more determined
than ever to study hard and practice more . . .

In your childhood, if roughhousing and play-fighting
(or even real fighting) was a part of daily life . . .

If you played competitive sports as part of a team.

If the only extra-curricular things you did were controlled
situations where you could practice and memorize your part
and you did not have to adapt or improvise under stress
(step back)

If your teacher uses the same attack combo twice in a row,
you are able to figure out the counter move before the
third time.

If you can step out of the car, late for armor inspection,
but still get focused and ready to fight within minutes . . .

At this point we have (two/three) obvious groups (with a few
outliers?)

- Have everyone cluster with their group where they can see the other group(s).

Ask the (Wolf) group what they notice about the (Tiger
Group).

- More men? - More Dons/Knights/MODs? - Why is that? (Does our
system reward this personality type?) Ask the (Tiger) group what

they notice about the (Wolf Group)

- More “helpers” - More students - **Do you think the other group(s) belongs in our game? Why or why not?**

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- **Do you think the other group has a disadvantage? Why or why not?** *IF there is a third group, ask them for observations about other two groups. Ask them how they see themselves.*

Everyone can go back to seats now

Hi, My name is Marie.

- I am a proud HufflePuff
- Myer's-Briggs INTJ
- D&D alignment Chaotic Neutral
 - In the corporate True Colors assessment, I am a Green.

I have either confused you, or I have just given you all the clues you need to figure out how to teach me, motivate me, and even manipulate me into liking you more.

The reason I start this class off with a series of questions is so I can group you into personality types. People love personality quizzes. We take quizzes to discover our Hogwarts House, D&D character class, and which GoT character or Muppet we are. We post our quiz results on facebook and reference them in discussions. We use them to explain how we make decisions, and why we have the friends that we have, etc.

In this class, I hope to demonstrate how personality types influence our individual approaches to fighting and learning to be better fighters, and then I hope to give you some ideas that you can take home to your local practice to make sure everyone gets the best fighter education for their personality type.

Why is it that two newbies can begin fighting in the same fighter practice on the same day, with the same teachers, and one of them will be winning tournaments in a handful of years but the other one hits a plateau that lasts more than a decade?

The questions I asked you at the beginning of class all involved a set of skills and personality traits that I like to think of as Pre-Fighting skills. Some of you are familiar with

an Early Childhood Education concept called Pre-Reading Skills. (explain what that is) So now we all understand what Pre-Reading skills are, I'm going to tell you that becoming a martial artist requires Pre-Fighting skills.

It is my belief that the reason some newbie-fighters succeed quickly, and some newbie-fighters seem to languish for years without progress, while yet more fighters simply disappear from the field and never come back to fighting, is because they were all taught using a "curriculum" that assumed they had Pre-Fighting skills. If a fighter does not have these skills, going to a regular ol' SCA fighter practice can feel like taking Calculus without ever having a math class before. You feel left behind, and you don't know why, and you probably assume it's your fault.

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Several years ago when I was trying to wrap my head around why I was always so far behind the curve on learning to fight, I ran across an article on the website BoxWrestleFence.com, called "When Equal Isn't Equal." That article taught me two things. One, **If you teach your students in exactly the same way that worked for you, then only people who think and learn just like you are going to excel and graduate.** Everyone else will fail and flunk out. Two, I learned how personality traits and pre-fighting skills feed into the way we learn about fencing, and from that I created a chart!

Note: Usually personality charts have four sections, but I am a volunteer in a volunteer organization and so two parts is all you get.

Wolf mindset Tiger mindset

Loves Swords Loves Swords

Thrives in Cooperative practice Thrives in Competitive Practice

De-Motivated by Failures lures (works
(assumes lack of aptitude)

20 minutes to Warm Up Instant Adrenaline

Childhood Roughhousing - Special Occasion
hhousing -

continue
notion under

Uses Emotion to release
stress in order to

Feels Guilt about beating someone else Wins
without guilt.

Syllabus, lesson plans, table of contents Just jump in and
figure it out.

First, both sides of the chart love swords. It's why we're here!

Next, the column I have labeled Wolves, this type of fighter thrives in a collaborative environment, while Tigers thrive under competition. Here is an example, on Friday night at bootcamp, we play a movement game I call the Add-on game. Everyone stands in a circle, and whoever is the "first" player does one movement, such as a jumping-jack, a hip circle, or they clap their hands - whatever. Then the second person imitates that first person's movement, plus also adds a new move at the end. Then the third person does the first and second moves, and adds a third. So on and so forth.

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How many of you in this room would turn this game into musical chairs, where the first person to mess up is "out" and the last person to get all the moves right, in order, is the winner? Raise hands, don't be shy. Congratulations, that is a classic Tiger trait and competition is a way that you stay motivated and focused on your goals.

Now here is how a group of Wolves play that same game. If someone messes up or forgets a movement, the group coaches them through it and reminds them of the order of moves. If they can't do a move because their mobility is limited, the group will suggest an alternative move. No one loses this game and everyone who stays in and gives their best effort is a winner. There is probably going to be a lot of hugging and laughing.

Now think about your own local fighter practice. Everyone, raise your hand if you have been in a situation where the person who was supposed to be teaching you to fight was actually more interested in using you as a Pell and beating you. How did that make you feel, as the Pell or Beginner in the lesson? Frustrated? Insulted? Motivated to work harder? There are no wrong

answers but notice that your answer may be different from your students or teachers. What I have described is a competitive practice format.

It's also a format that is full of moments of failure for the student. (next line on the chart). Tigers can use failure to focus their efforts and stay motivated to practice on their own. I've heard someone say "My teacher kept hitting me in the head, so I'm going to go home, and between now and the next practice, I'm going to learn that block until I have it perfect." But a Wolf fighter might now see it that way. Wolves, whether this is an inborn trait or something about how they were raised by their parents, see a Failure as a SIGN FROM THE GODS that they are not meant to do the thing. You will hear a wolf say, "No matter how hard I try, I can't get it right. I guess I don't have the talent. I am wasting my teacher's time. I should find a different hobby."

BOOM. Right there. Why do some fighters come to three or four practices and then just stop showing up?

Lets' skip ahead a little and look at the chart section on Roughhousing. Those of you who ended up on the Tiger side of the room, you probably had brothers, or your dad liked to wrestle with you, and you took some bumps and bruises every day. From that you learned that it's okay to hurt sometimes, but more importantly, you learned that you can Lose a fight and still be friends with the other fighter. But a Wolf personality did not get that opportunity in childhood, and people were rarely ever rough with us. Without brothers to thump us on the head every single day, we learned that the only people who will pick on us are bullies and we should hate those people.

This makes it really hard to go through a tournament or a sparring-practice and not get really upset. As a wolf, it feels like people who should be my friends are bullying me all day and when I find myself about to win against a less experienced opponent, now *I* feel like *I* am a bully.

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Wolves might lose that round on purpose, in order to preserve their friendship with their opponent. They might not even know they are doing it.

We can't do anything about people's childhoods and we can't rewire each other's brains, but we can adjust the ways we teach and the way practices are run, to give each type of student a positive-feedback loop. We can make our practices into an environment where it is safe to try, and where being brave enough to try is not constantly punished by failure. We can teach each other How To Compete and Still be Friends.

Starting at the top of the chart. (under Loves Swords)

Competitive vs. Collaborative

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Given: Competition is at the base of what we do.

1. Compare: Number of tournaments a year vs regional fighter practices. If you are going to travel several hours to fight with people you don't normally fight against, Chances are it's for a tournament and you want to win. It is not a practice where you feel fuzzy warm feelings about testing new ideas.
 - a. As teachers, you can't shield your students from competition. It's everywhere in the SCA. But you can help them learn to thrive in spite of it.
2. How many of you have ever participated in organized youth sports or watched one of your children's sports practices? Did the coach start at the beginning of the hour with a scrimmage that lasted the whole practice time? Or did the coach do some skills drills like ball-handling and passing, teach some techniques, do some wind-sprints, and only do scrimmage in the last ten or fifteen minutes?
 - a. Sparring-only practice = taking standardized tests every school day. Not the best learning system for everyone.
 - b. We can prepare people for competitions (tournaments) better by giving a well-rounded training experience.
 - c. We also need to be mindful about someone's lack of an athletic background.

Valeria tells the story that she was doing Scapular push-ups to strengthen the muscles between her shoulder blades, and when her husband asked her why she was doing it, she said, "To teach those muscles to activate when I need them to." He was knocked over with shock to realize that some people have muscles that don't do what they're supposed to do. So again, jumping into the Calculus class when you have not trained the muscles of your hand to hold a pencil is made of fail. d. Back to the way little league coaches teach. Part of every practice is

calisthenics and strength training. Because sports, and yo - fencing is a sport!, sports require muscles that do the things you want them to do when you want them to do it. If you have ever been athletically fit in your life, even if you were a child at the time, your body is already hardwired to get fit and strong faster than

someone who has never been athletic. No matter how out of shape you may become later in life, your muscles know how to activate and do the thing. If your student never used their muscles for anything more strenuous than turning the

pages of a book, then you have some work to do. e. Sports coaches agree, in the mundane world, that scrimmages or sparring

practice should never be more than 30% of your practice time. The other 70% is skills drills, muscular training, and general fitness. But in the SCA our practices are almost entirely sparring, or we at most flip those percentages to something like 15 minutes of drills before 2 hours of sparring. Teachers in the room - fix this for your students please. Students in the room - if your teacher has not fixed this for you, then it's now your job. Do the math and however much time you spent sparring on Wednesday night, you need three or four times that many minutes in a gym or doing drills at home.

2. What else might be lacking in Sparring/Scrimmages/Competitions as a learning tool?

a. Let's talk about your students self-esteem as fighters. We mentioned earlier that Wolves are de-motivated by failure. If I have no pre-fight skills, or my pre-fight skills are in the beginner clunky stages, putting me into a competitive environment just trains me how to lose. b. But it also lies and tells me that I have no talent for fighting and maybe I never

will. Why would I dump in hundreds of dollars of gas money to travel to tournaments, why would I buy a custom sword that costs as much as a car-payment, why would I sleep on the ground in the cold at BAM - just to be a pell for other fighters??

3. What are alternatives to a competition-centered learning environment?

[pause for ideas from class] a. Drills.

- i. In drills you only compete with yourself, and you can slow things down or take skills to the smallest level in order to find the right success:failure ratio. b. Sparring to beat your opponent vs. sparring with complementary goals (You practice toe-shots while I practice the counter move) c. Stopping after each sparring-pass to have the instant replay discussion. d. Pair an advanced student with a lot of control with your beginner and have them practice the moves the beginner knows, but NOT the moves the beginner has not learned yet. Have your advanced student aim to make it challenging enough that the beginner only succeeds 60% of the time. If the beginner hits 80% success, have your advanced teacher ramp things up just until we're back at 60.
- i. This teaches your beginner that failure is expected, and okay, and perfection is not a place to sit down and nap. Perfection is not even a reasonable goal. e. Other non-competitive exercises:

i. Doing a slow-motion replay of a fight to discuss alternative moves.

Watching a video of someone else's fight and walking through it slowly as if it were choreography. ii. Melees are inherently collaborative. If you like winning wars, your

(Wolves) fighters are your best troops. I often take beginners into melees as a way to let them feel the joys of success before I throw them into a tournament.

Another fun pop-quiz!!

Actual Advice I have been given by teachers. **Is this collaborative or competitive mindset?**

- f. "Treat every practice as if it were a Tournament and treat every Tournament as if it were Queens."
 - i. Competitive and great for (Tigers). ii. Also very good for intermediate and advanced (Wolves) to help them mentally rehearse tournament mode. iii. Terrible for beginner (Wolves) or anyone with performance anxiety. g. "Every practice you go to, do ten passes, and keep track of how many times you won and how many times you lost. Keep track of who you fought so you can compare the score next time you fight that person." h. "Don't worry about the outcome, Just have fun."
 - i. Seems collaborative but sets me up to hate non-fun experiences like losing over and over in a sparring-only situation. i. "Pick a technique and focus on using that technique in all of your bouts. Don't worry about the score, just try to successfully use that technique."
 - i. This is competitive, but the only person you are competing with is yourself, making your opponent into a partner and assistant. Therefore it becomes collaborative.
5. Recalling the advice to "just have fun." What are fun ways to learn fighting?
- j. Games: Slap hands or sticky fingers, Chase you chase me, glove-tag. Red-rover melees. k. Ask your student (or yourself) what is fun about fighting? And try to set up conditions like that.
 - i. Ex: I like long drawn out exchanges with lots of parrying and counter

attacking. So I might set a goal of staying in the fight as long as possible before making my first attack. ii. Someone else may think that doing ten bouts with each partner and

counting score **is** fun and if so, do that.

Failure and Motivation:

1. Operant Conditioning

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a. Create conditions that give positive feedback and make success more attainable.

i. Novice tournaments. ii. Bedford-style tournaments? b. Redefine "success"

i. Not win/lose but

1. focused/distracted 2. good technique/bad technique. 3. Got in three good parries before dying ii. Sometimes getting armored up in the first place is a win. c. Literal Operant Conditioning (Pavlov).

i. Elspeth Money Penny has a whole class on Clicker Training. You should go

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2. Break things down into smaller parts:

a. Style of teaching:

i. Common: "I will hit you until you learn to block," is bad for (Wolves), but great for (Tigers). ii. *Here is a block, practice it slow. Speed up gradually, Now do it at speed.*

Now throw in into a free-sparring session and try to remember to use it. (Wolves) b.

Measure success by skill display instead of tournament results. i. Ex: Used a particular parry in real time. Success! ii. Ex: Stayed focused in a touch bout. Success!

c. Remove the sword. If the student is struggling to coordinate their limbs and their

brain and also a sword, and they are getting overwhelmed by the data, take away the sword.

i. Use a pool noodle ii. Throw bean bags or hacky-sacks at them and make them parry. iii.

Bounce a tennis ball off the ground in front of them and have them catch

the ball in stance. iv. Then go back and try the exercise again with a sword. See if

their

confidence, focus, and willingness to take risks that might cause a failure, has improved.

3. Use videos.

a. Personal testimonial. Video has been one of the biggest game changers for me. I fall squarely into the category of being demotivated by failure. If I can't become "good" at something quickly, I assume that God has decided I'm not talented at that thing and I should find a different thing. This is how I was raised and I was literally encouraged by my parents to quit anything that I wasn't "talented" at. Fencing is the only thing I have ever wanted to do and wasn't immediately decent at. For the first time in my life, I had to learn how to learn, instead of relying on latent "talent." I was out-in-two in every tournament ever, for years. Then one

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day we took video. The first time I ever saw myself fighting in a video, there I was on the TV - I rocked my opponent's shoulder back but they didn't call it and kept fighting. I had not realized, during the fight, that I'd thrown a good shot. In the end my opponent killed me. In real time, I walked off the field and felt like a failure. But seeing that video a week later entirely changed my perspective and self-esteem. I won that fight, I WON A FIGHT!! Maybe my first one ever. Or maybe I had been winning for months and didn't know because I was so stressed out I couldn't pay attention to things like shoulders rocking back. Okay, so my opponent didn't acknowledge it or notice it, but I won. Until I saw that on video I didn't know I could win. **I went from taking it for granted that I was a born loser, to understanding that I had what it took to win.** And all it cost my teacher was standing there and videoing that fight, then playing it back for me later.

4. Frame Failure as an expected and required part of the process. Remember than most

Wolves see "failure" as evidence of a lack of ability or aptitude. They do not have the pre-fighting skills, or the history of learning how to compete, to understand that failure is just a data point. Often they internalize a failure of skill as a character flaw (ie: "I suck" instead of "I need more practice with that technique.")

- a. Literally state "My goal is for you to get this right 60% of the time." b. **Practice giving feedback that separates the result from the person.** You can lose a fight and still be a good fighter. c. What does Good mean, anyway? Does "good" mean always getting past the second round? But what if I drew John and Miguel in the first round for five Queen's

in a row (not joking, this happened to a friend). Does that make me less “good” than someone who always gets three fights with newbies at every tournament they’re in? Make sure your student knows YOUR definition of Good and doesn’t have their intestines in a series of knots because they think they have to count coup. d. Set an expectation that perfection just means you’re not learning and growing. If you have that student who only wants to do the same drills all the time, and never be in an uncontrolled situation where they might lose the game - that is someone who was probably raised in ballet or music performance, and they are not comfortable with anything less than perfection. You have to tell them that the best fights are messy and improved. e. Talk about “you’ve mastered that drill so I am going to increase the difficulty until you only succeed 6/10 times.”

i. Important to discuss that this is not a punishment but an upgrade.

Conclusion

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At this point we’ve only covered only a small piece of the chart, but we have used most of our hour. For the rest of these items, your homework is to talk it out with each other. Hopefully this class has given everyone an awareness of how learning styles and past experiences affect your fighting. Now go forth and have conversations with your practice partners, students, and teachers.

Remember - Both sides of this chart LOVE SWORDS. Both sides add value to our community. We need people from both sides to continue to find reasons to keep showing up, if we want our community and our game to continue for the next generation or two.

