



# The Athlete Warrior

## 5 Principles for Becoming a Champion Part 2



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In Part One of this article, Alison discussed how Eastern Philosophy and Martial Arts principles could be integrated in American Gymnastics. She discussed five characteristics of the Athlete Warrior and gave training tips for implementing each characteristic in the gym. In this article, she discusses five more principles of the Athlete Warrior and how to build these qualities in yourself.

In the first article in this series we looked at how the principles of intention, awareness, belief, being present, and discipline can be easily implemented in the gym to become an Athlete Warrior. This second part will look at the last five principles of the Athlete Warrior and ways to build these qualities in yourself.

The move toward Eastern philosophy has been fueled by our Western desire to be more. As we strive to increase difficulty, increase consistency, and increase our joy in gymnastics, we look to new philosophies to fuel our old ways of thinking. The teachings of eastern and martial arts philosophy give us new glasses to look at old ways. They answer questions like, "How can I compete my best?", "How can I train my mind as well as my body?" and most importantly, "What is my big picture purpose as I do gymnastics everyday?" Teaching yourself the principles of the Athlete Warrior helps you know how to live as well as how to succeed in gymnastics. Isn't that why you do this anyway?

## Trust

### Principle Number One: Trust

Trust is one of the most important elements in gymnastics. A gymnast must trust their training, trust their coach, and most importantly, trust themselves to get the job done. When you are ready for a new skill, you must trust your body. When you compete, you must trust the numbers that have been put in during training. Ultimately, trusting life is the most important lesson of the Athlete Warrior. The Athlete Warrior believes that everything is evolving exactly as it should be. Sometimes life is hard to understand. It is full of curveballs, questions, and situations that appear as setbacks. The trusting warrior is not a victim. They see the gift in adversity and face challenges aggressively. Trust is a difficult skill. Many of us question and doubt training, decisions, and ultimately, the course of life. Look at your life. Everything that has ever happened to you has brought you to this moment. Even the seemingly "bad" events have taught you valuable lessons and have made you stronger. Every occurrence in life has a lesson. Everything is your teacher. The Athlete Warrior sees the value of each situation. They find the gift amidst the pain and disappointment and use it to fuel them toward the future

## Training tips for Principle One:

- Practice seeing the gifts amidst adversity.
- Do your numbers and then trust your numbers.
- Trust the decisions and requests of your coach.
- Say trusting statements to yourself. Say things like "I know I can do this," "I trust my training", and "If my coach says that I'm ready then I'm ready".

## Joy

### Principle Number Two: Joy

The best performances come when a gymnast is having fun. Being frustrated, or feeling burned out at times is a normal experience for any high level gymnast. The Athlete Warrior knows that burnout is temporary. He or she focuses on what's good in his or her sport and keeps a positive attitude even during difficult periods. Think about the beginners in gymnastics. They are lost and entranced simply with the experience of doing it. Be it the feeling of flying through the air, or flipping upside down, the beginners love to do gymnastics because they love the feeling of doing gymnastics. Most of the time, the magic is lost when you focus too much on outcome. Scores, awards, placements, take away from the sheer joy of the sport. Focusing too much on future goals also takes some of the joy away from simply being in the moment. This moment is so precious. There will never be another like it. You will never again be in this day of practice, with these people. Don't miss the moment by forgetting the beauty and joy of it. Remember, joy is not just about goofing around. The most joy in sport can come from times when the athlete is working his or her hardest.

## Training tips for Principle Two:

- Don't forget to have fun in the gym. Especially during the height of the competitive season.
- Keep in mind that this is the only day you have. Take advantage of every workout.
- Don't freak out over bad days. Work with it, get what you can out of it, and move on.
- Encouraging others is a good way to enjoy your workout. Remember, you make yourself better when your teammates are better.

## Compassion

### Principle Number Three: Compassion

The Athlete Warrior is incredibly strong. He or she is awake, alive, and in touch with both the joy and sorrows of the world. The Athlete Warrior is strong enough to feel the struggles of others and ease their suffering. They are not afraid of pain, but invite pain in order to live fully. The Athlete Warrior stands with strength and courage, but also with a tear of compassion running down his cheek. The Athlete Warrior knows that supporting and

confronting can both be forms of compassion. Sometimes a teammate needs a pat on the back and sometimes a teammate needs a kick in the butt. A superior gymnast has the wisdom to know when each is needed, and has the ability to confront with skill and kindness. The Athlete Warrior is compassionate yet disciplined with themselves. They understand the difference between motivation and deflation. They are patient, yet disciplined, with themselves and others. They don't take things personally and hold grudges. They don't label and judge, but rather understand human nature and the ways we all struggle in the world.

## Training tips for Principle Three:

- Notice your self-talk. Is your self-talk bringing you up or beating you down. Notice when you are being motivational to yourself, or when you are simply beating yourself up.
- Be compassionate to your teammates. Don't judge others or participate in gossip.
- Help your teammates be the best they can be. Encourage them and be happy when they succeed. Don't be a jealous teammate.
- Model kindness with other gyms, ex-athletes, or ex-coaches.
- Do random acts of kindness for your parents, teachers, coaches, and others who support you day in, day out!

## Change

### Principle Number Four: Impermanence (everything changes)

The only guarantee in life is that everything changes. Especially in the world of sports. The Athlete Warrior is ready for change and adapts in ways that fuel performance. Life is full of ups and downs. It is rarely steady. The Athlete Warrior handles the ups and downs of life gracefully, without getting frustrated, angry, or discouraged. How can you use turbulent times as motivation to take you to the next level? Being able to adapt and use frustration as fuel divides the mentally weak from the mentally strong. Albert Einstein said, "In the middle of difficulty, lies opportunity." Every moment of training and competition is an opportunity. The power to seize that opportunity lies within every athlete. What if you believed that nothing "bad" ever happened to you. That everything that happened in your life was simply an opportunity for growth as a gymnast and a person. Using everything as fuel means seeing and acting on the opportunity presented in every situation. Seeing each situation in the best possible light. Finding the positive amidst the negative. Searching for the gift inside the gloom.

## Training tips for Principle Four:

- Understand and know that change is normal.
- Use adversity as fuel. Even an injury can help you become stronger!
- Stay positive during hard times. Keep doing whatever you can to be a better athlete and person.
- Remember: during the difficult times is when you grow. Search for the gift in every situation.

# Purpose

## Principle Number Five: Purpose

When you know your purpose, everything seems to make more sense. Why do you do gymnastics? What is your gift to give? We all are involved in this sport because we love it, that is for sure. But what's the bigger picture? Why do you sacrifice so much day in and day out? Everything you do should have a purpose. Every day in the gym, even down to every turn you take. Having purpose brings you full circle in this article. All the way back to Principle number One: Intention. When you have purpose, your intention is clear. When your intention is clear, you make your dreams happen. Think of not having purpose in a workout. You would simply not have any direction! Take the time to decide what you want to do with each turn and make it happen.

Purpose is also about why you do gymnastics. Is it JUST to get a college scholarship or hang out with friends? You do it because it is teaching you about life. All the lessons you learn in the gym are life lessons. How do you handle adversity? How do you deal with gossip and meanness towards a teammate? How do you handle the "thrill of victory and the agony of defeat"? Everything in gymnastics will come back around in your life after the sport. The way you deal with training hard and then not making it to Regionals is the same as working hard and not getting the job promotion you want. Use gymnastics as your teacher to help you handle later life experiences.

The deepest of the three levels is your purpose in life. Why did you come here? What are you supposed to do? What are you supposed to give? How can you make a difference? Your purpose in life is independent of place, time, money, or circumstance. It is something you can do in any state, any job, or any situation. Think about something you have always done well. Something you have felt "born to do". Your purpose is something that comes very easy to you. It is your special gift that has been with you possibly all your life. Maybe you inspire others. Or have the ability to connect with children or animals like no other. Maybe you are here to teach. Or help others see their own greatness. Whatever it is, finding your purpose helps your entire life flow no matter what obstacles come your way.

### Training tips for Principle Five:

- Decide on your purpose every day in training. Take advantage of every turn.
- Give your gifts. Be a team leader, motivator, and role model.
- Remember: gymnastics is about life lessons. Gymnastics teaches you about overcoming obstacles, leadership, pushing through fears, staying positive, compassion, and determination.

Living the life of the Athlete Warrior means living a life awake, open, with purpose, and with no regrets. These principles will help you live fearlessly, and more joyfully. Not to mention, taking your gymnastics to a whole new level. Try it. Become the Jedi Master of your gym!