

老山羊师傅的收徒三问：半途而废的猴子都答不上来

山里谁都知道，老山羊收徒弟极严。不是考爬树，也不是考力气，它只问三个问题。想拜师的猴子站在它面前，三问答不上来，干粮袋子就背回去。它教过的猴子不少，半途而废的，全都栽在同一批误区上。老山羊自己数过，一共五个。

第一个误区：想学的不是「一招」，是「七十二变」。第一问「你想学哪一招」，十只猴子有八只答「七十二变」。老山羊的原话是：「七十二变是七十二招加在一起的名字，不是招的名字。你说不出要学哪一招，就等于没说要学什么。」答不上来的猴子，练了三天就开始换招，今天变石头，明天变树，后天觉得变水缸更神气，每招都停在第一天的水平。老山羊管这叫「猴子掰苞谷」。

第二个误区：把「学会」当成一个突然的时刻。第二问「你打算练多少天」，猴子们最爱答「练到学会为止」。老山羊说：「这句话听着有志气，其实最危险。它等于说：哪天我『感觉到』自己会了，才算会。感觉靠不住。我的规矩是数日子：一招练满三十天，练没练会，墙上三十笔正字说了算。」半途而废的猴子都在等那个「突然会了」的感觉，等不到就走。

第三个误区：练不会的那天，什么也不做。第三问最关键：「练不会那天你做什么？」所有答错的猴子都沉默了。它们默认练不会就休息、就换招、就改天。老山羊的规矩是：练不会的那天照练，刻正字，只是第二天接着练同一招。它说：「半途而废不是从『不学了』那天开始的，是从『今天练不会，那就今天不练了』那天开始的。」

第四个误区：跟别人比进度。有只猴子学了十招，看见同门学了十二招，当天就下山了。老山羊知道后只说了一句：「它跟同门比了两天，自己少练了两年。」后来老山羊定了一条新规矩：不许问同门学到第几招，只许看自己墙上的正字。比进度偷走的不是时间，是明天还想练的那点念头。

第五个误区：只在有劲的时候练。有只猴子状态好时一天练三个时辰，状态差时一笔不刻。老山羊让它把三个时辰拆成每天一个时辰，拆完它反而多练了两个月。老山羊说：「本领不是从最猛的一天长出来的，是从最平常的一天长出来的。」太阳偏西就收工那条规矩，就是为了不让猴子把明天累垮。

三问答不上来不要紧，老山羊允许猴子下山想清楚再来。但它有一条硬规矩：第二次来拜师，三问必须一字不差答上来——学哪一招、练多少天、练不会那天做什么。答上来的猴子，它一律收。多年下来，答上来的猴子没有一个半途而废。它们后来常回山上看那面墙，墙上刻的不只是正字，是一天一天不肯断的日子。本领要练，坚持才行——这句话不是道理，是墙。

Old Goat Master's Three Admission Questions: Every Monkey Who Gave Up Halfway Failed Them

Everyone in the hills knows Old Goat is extremely strict about taking apprentices. He doesn't test tree-climbing or strength. He asks only three questions. A monkey who comes to apprentice stands before him, and if it can't answer the three

questions, it carries its food bag back down. He has taught many monkeys, and every one that gave up halfway stumbled on the same batch of mistakes. Old Goat counted them himself: five in all.

Mistake one: what they want to learn is not 'one trick' but 'the seventy-two transformations.' To the first question - 'which trick do you want to learn?' - eight of ten monkeys answer 'the seventy-two transformations.' Old Goat's exact words: 'Seventy-two transformations is the name of seventy-two tricks added together, not the name of a trick. If you can't name which trick you want, you haven't said you want to learn anything.' Monkeys who couldn't answer started switching tricks after three days - a stone today, a tree tomorrow, and the day after they decide the water jar looks grander, leaving every trick stuck at day-one level. Old Goat calls this 'the monkey snapping corn.'

Mistake two: treating 'mastered it' as a sudden moment. To the second question - 'how many days will you practice?' - monkeys love answering 'until I've mastered it.' Old Goat says: 'That sounds ambitious, and it's the most dangerous sentence of all. It means: I'll count as learned only on the day I feel I've got it. Feelings are unreliable. My rule is to count days: practice one trick for a full thirty days, mastered or not, and the thirty tally strokes on the wall decide.' Every monkey that quit halfway was waiting for that sudden 'now I've got it' feeling, and left when it never came.

Mistake three: doing nothing on the day you fail. The third question is the key one: 'What do you do on the day you fail?' Every monkey that answered wrong went silent. They assume that on a failed day they rest, switch tricks, or try another day. Old Goat's rule: on a failed day, practice anyway, carve the tally stroke, and keep practicing the same trick the next day. He says: 'Giving up halfway doesn't begin on the day you say I quit. It begins on the day you say I failed today, so I won't practice today.'

Mistake four: comparing progress with others. One monkey had learned ten tricks, saw a fellow apprentice at twelve, and went down the mountain that same day. When Old Goat heard, he said only: 'It spent two days comparing with its classmate and lost two years of its own practice.' Old Goat then set a new rule: no asking classmates which trick they're on; look only at your own tally marks. Comparing progress doesn't steal time - it steals the little wish to practice again tomorrow.

Mistake five: practicing only when in the mood. One monkey practiced three shichen on good days and carved nothing on bad days. Old Goat had it split the three shichen into one shichen every day, and after the split it practiced two months longer. Old Goat said: 'A skill doesn't grow from your most heroic day. It grows from your most ordinary day.' The quit-when-the-sun-tilts-west rule exists precisely so

monkeys don't exhaust tomorrow.

Failing the three questions is not fatal - Old Goat lets monkeys go down the mountain, think it through, and come back. But he has one hard rule: on the second visit, the three answers must be word-perfect - which trick, how many days, and what you do on the day you fail. Any monkey that answers, he takes. Over the years, not one monkey that answered gave up halfway. They often return to see that wall. The wall holds more than tally marks - it holds day after day that refused to break. Skills must be practiced, and persistence is what works. That sentence isn't a moral. It's the wall.