

**Combating the Commercialism of Martial arts**  
**Keeping students interested in traditional training**

**By**

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## **Combating the commercialism of martial arts: Keeping students interested in traditional training**

### **How and why karate and other traditional martial arts have changed**

For many of us who have studied the traditional martial arts for a significant length of time, the practice is a commitment; a way of life, a manner of being, rather than simply a hobby or competitive sport. The traditional arts are both mental and physical, spiritual and tangible, and for many of us the “sport” aspect of our training is simply one small branch of a much larger whole.

Over the last several decades in particular, there have been significant changes in the way the martial arts are taught and studied in America, with a heavy focus on competition and incorporating an almost “anything goes” blending of styles, as well as other fighting sports, such as boxing and wrestling. Whatever the initial intentions, the result has been severe and, some feel, irreversible.

#### **1. The birth and rise in popularity of the UFC/Mixed Martial Arts and the Franchise Dojo**

On November 12, 1993, the first Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC) took place. In describing this event, *Wikipedia* states:

The sport gained international exposure and widespread publicity when jiu-jitsu fighter Royce Gracie won the first Ultimate Fighting Championship tournament, submitting three challengers in a total of just five minutes, sparking a revolution in martial arts.

In his first match, Gracie defeated journeyman boxer Art Jimmerson. He tackled him to the ground using a *baiana* (morote-gari or double-leg) and obtained the dominant "mounted" position, also pinning Jimmerson's left arm around the boxer's own neck. Mounted and with only one free arm Jimmerson conceded defeat.

In the semi-finals, Gracie defeated Ken Shamrock and went on to defeat a Karate and Savate practitioner Gerard Gordeau, taking his opponent to the ground and securing a rear choke.

In the next tournament, UFC 2, Gracie began his defense of the title by submitting Japanese fighter Minoki Ichihara - a second degree black belt in Karatedo Daido Juku and Kyokushin karate, who was billed by the UFC at the time as a "living legend" in Tokyo, who had won over 60 full-contact fights. The fight had gone 5:08, which was longer than Royce's 3 bouts in the first event (totaling 4:59). Advancing into the quarterfinals, Royce Gracie defeated future Pancrase veteran Jason DeLucia, submitting him via armbar just over a minute into the bout. Gracie then submitted 250-lb Judo and Taekwondo black belt Remco Pardoel<sup>[6]</sup> with a lapel choke, and finally won the final bout against Patrick Smith, when his opponent submitted to punches from the top position.

Gracie's manner of fighting was unique at the time he came on the scene. According to *Gracie.com*, the Gracie method was developed in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century by Carlos Gracie, Royce Gracie's grandfather, who had studied traditional Japanese jiu-jitsu under Mitsuyo Maeda. Carlos Gracie, who was also a boxer and was interested in street fighting, combined all of his training and interests in order to meet the demands of actual "no rules" fighting in the streets of Brazil. Although he was a slight man at 135 pounds, he was undefeated and became a legend in Brazil. Gracie had 21 children and passed his skills to them, as well as other members of his extended family. The Gracie style was extremely influential in the formation of MMA, and is largely a variation of Brazilian jiu-jitsu. Wikipedia further describes Brazilian jiu-jitsu, as well as the Gracie adaptations as follows:

### **Ground fighting**

BJJ is most strongly differentiated from other martial arts by its greater emphasis on ground fighting. Commonly, striking-based styles spend almost no time on groundwork. Even other grappling martial arts tend to spend much more time on the standing phase. It is helpful to contrast its rules with Olympic judo's greater emphasis on throws, due to both its radically different point-scoring system, and the absence of most of the judo rules that cause the competitors to have to recommence in a standing position. This has led to greater time dedicated to training on the ground similar to that of Kosen Judo, resulting in enhancement and new research of groundwork techniques by BJJ practitioners.

Along with BJJ's strengths on the ground comes its relative underemphasis of standing techniques, such as striking. To remedy this comparative lack, there is an emphasis on take-downs and cross-training between BJJ, wrestling, judo, and sambo, as well as striking based arts such as boxing, karate, taekwondo, Muay Thai, and kickboxing.

### **Training methods**

Sport BJJ focus on submissions without the use of strikes while training allows practitioners to practice at full speed and with full power, resembling the effort used in a real competition. Training methods include technique drills in which techniques are practiced against a non-resisting partner; isolation sparring, commonly referred to as positional drilling, where only a certain technique or sets of techniques are used, and full sparring in which each opponent tries to submit their opponent using any legal technique. Physical conditioning is also an important part of training at many clubs. The Gracie family focuses on real world applications for BJJ. While other businesses and companies tend to focus on the sporting aspect of BJJ, the Gracie's maintain a strict way of training that is primarily self-defense. They will often run reflex development drills in which one person is surrounded by a circle of other students who will attempt to attack the defending student, who in turn must defend themselves using "street" Jiu-jitsu techniques. The student will often be unable to see the aggressor to simulate an attack that they weren't expecting.

It is important to note that the popularity of extreme sports/MMA has actually proven to be both a benefit and detriment to the traditional arts. The exposure through these sports has increased interest in the martial arts in general, but at the same time is inconsistent with traditional teachings. By their very nature, the commercial Mixed Martial Arts that have captured the public's attention are designed mainly for competition and to entertain. Although most of the traditional arts certainly have some focus centered on tournaments and other competition in their training, the main, and some argue only focus of these newer styles is competition and victory.

Simultaneously with the rise of these systems has been the rise of what is often referred to as the "McDojo." The increased interest in martial arts has been profitable for many. Unfortunately, some who practice the arts have attempted to attract students by significantly diminishing the kyu belt-level requirements, and even more troubling, the black belt

requirements. There has been a trend to enable students to fast-track to a black belt, sometimes in less than one year. Despite the obvious downside to this philosophy due to its lack of time to form a stable base of knowledge and all-important long-term training, it has proven for some to be a brilliant marketing tool and can be very lucrative for the sensei at the dojo where it is offered.

The types of dojo that promote this type of expedited or simplified training are frequently chains (i.e. franchised), and hence the moniker of “McDojo” was born. *Mcdojo-faq.tripod.com* describes a “McDojo” as:

...a school that teaches a watered-down and impractical form of martial arts in the name of making money. They place the importance of profit well ahead of teaching anything realistic or credible in terms of self-defense, and are dangerous is the aspect that they send unprepared & often over-confident students into a world thinking they can fight when in actuality they have no real fighting skills. Often McDojos teach a lot of bullshido, which is a term used to define deception, fraud, and lies in terms of martial arts.

This article discusses that earning a black belt has lost almost all meaning.

There used to be a time where a black belt meant something, back in days where it took years upon years of intense training, pain, and sacrifice. Those who wore a black belt around their waist had earned it, and they knew how to fight. Those days are gone though, and honestly, having a black belt anymore is useless. Who doesn't have one? With McDojos cranking out thousands of black belts to students who've trained maybe one or two years, there is no standard anymore. We have hundreds of thousands of black belts under 12, many even under 6, and a society that believes they earned them. We have 12 year old 3rd degree black belt instructors, wheelchair bound people with black belts, morbidly obese people with black belts, and we have 30 year old 9th degree grand masters. We have people who have never been hit or actually hit another person wearing a black belt, and people who think forms and one-steps are crucial to learning how to fight. All of these people are essentially ballet dancers with gi's on: they've taken the martial arts and turned it into a dance. To accommodate everyone and anyone willing to pay for their black belt, they've lowered the standards so that even a 6 year old could pass the test. They've ruined any honor of earning a black belt forever, yet these students who unknowingly wear the rank they have not truly earned yet don't know that they don't have any fighting skills.

Since this practice is certainly dangerous on many levels; most poignantly the reality that the practitioner has not truly mastered the necessary skills or gained sufficient experience for his/her belt level, many seasoned martial artists have posted warnings to the public so that they can recognize and avoid the “McDojo.”

Jesse Enkamp of *KaratebyJesse.com*, posted an article entitled “*93 Warning Signs your Dojo is a McDojo.*” An extensive list is included in the article; however, some of his warning signs are:

1. You wear *multicolored uniforms*.
2. The dojo advertises as “*Non-Contact Karate*”.
3. You wear a thousand *badges/patches* on your gi.
4. You are awarded *black belt* in 1-2 years.
5. Advancement to the next rank is an *expense* (and a hefty one at that), instead of an *honorable achievement*.
6. Prospective students are *required* to become a member/subscribe before even *trying a lesson*.
7. Your sensei is a “*grandmaster*” with 7th dan or above, yet is 30 years or younger.
8. There is a “*special course*” that’ll get you black belt in *6 months or less*. (*And yes, that course is super expensive.*)
9. Your sensei won’t spar/fight with you because he “*doesn’t want to hurt you*”.

*mcdajo-faq.tripod.com* suggests that a school should be avoided if (abbreviated list):

1. Instead of focusing on sparring, the class is mostly divided into practicing kata/forms, one-steps, board breaks, etc.
2. If the school or instructor forbids entering tournaments, or if tournaments are restricted to specific styles or associations.
3. If the idea of take-downs or wrestling is never addressed, or if “anti-grappling” techniques are taught.
4. If the test for belt advancement consists mostly or entirely of memorization and making your form & one-steps look pretty
5. If board breaking has a heavy emphasis, or is taught to be an indicating [sic] to how well you would fight, or is used as a supplement to full contact fighting.
6. If the school has too many belts, or made up belts (such as camouflage belts)
7. If the school insists on long contracts and or uses collection agencies for late or missed payments.

8. If the self-defense techniques that are taught aren't at full speed or contact, or if the school is insistent only on one way of doing it.
9. If the school has many students, such as over 100, or if there are many black belts
10. The instructor rarely works out with the students and has his assistants do most or all of the teaching

As mentioned in these articles, being trained in this inferior manner is dangerous and, honestly, arguably fraudulent. It can instill a false sense of security in the practitioner, and in parents if those practitioners are children. Just going through the motions of a diluted program does not benefit anyone, except possibly the dojo owners by way of profits.

It can be argued that this style of teaching in this country has developed as a result of demand. It is no secret that Americans have become impatient beings who are accustomed to immediate gratification and reward. Americans have increasingly packed their lives with activities and obligations to the point where they have very little time to spare; or at least that is their perception. The traditional slow, steady method of martial arts training, in which skills are honed and polished over a period of years, directly conflicts with that mentality and lifestyle. It is an adjustment and sacrifice many are simply not willing to make. However, that is not an excuse for poor teaching and putting students at risk.

## **2. Traditional training. What does it mean? Why is it important?**

So, what defines “traditional” training and why is it important? Sensei **Andrea Jackson** of Dragon Arts Karate in Oregon, on their website, *dragon-arts-karate.com*, differentiates “traditional martial arts” from “non-traditional martial arts” as follows:

**Traditional martial arts** are usually historically recognized styles with a historic lineage of teachers and students. **Non-traditional martial arts** are more often a mix of styles, or one teacher’s interpretation of one or more martial arts. Traditional martial arts more often also incorporate tradition and culture into their teachings, whereas non-traditional arts are typically more modern in their approaches.

Sensei Jackson continues by stating that although the various styles of traditional martial arts have differences, or even may contradict each other, that helps to strengthen traditional training.

Most of these differences in form are not a matter of better or worse, but the issues of form have to be understood within the complete context of a style. This is one of the greatest strengths of traditional martial arts. Students master a very cohesive set of fundamentals that later allow them to progress far in their mastery.

In non-traditional arts, students often learn basic practices that are contradictory to each other, and that can lead to a wide range of knowledge, but not to a particular level of mastery overall. I would compare it to building a car. Usually a particular brand of car makes parts that are designed to go well together and to work well together as an overall system. If you take different fundamental car parts (we're talking the guts of the car here, not the exterior design), and put them all together haphazardly, you are not as likely to get a well-functioning car.

Sensei Jackson suggests that, quite literally by the process of elimination, only the most effective martial arts training has been passed down over the centuries.

Historically, people that survived life and death fights passed on the best martial arts. Those that did not survive did not pass on their arts. Also, martial arts teachers were traditionally challenged in fights to the death by other martial artists. Because of this, traditional arts are usually a process of survival of the most effective types of fighting.

From this statement one can assume that Sensei Jackson is referring to very ancient times when martial arts were used mainly for self-defense, since obviously there are many masters who did not engage in life-or-death fighting of this magnitude, yet still passed down effective martial arts. However, Sensei's point is valid; the traditional arts in existence today incorporate methods and strategies for training, fighting, and self-improvement developed over hundreds of years. Some non-traditional artists form their own styles, using parts of other system, which do not have the same history.

Odayaka Martial Arts Dojo is a traditional dojo, and in fact is more traditional than many other dojo due to its focus on a version of Shorei Ryu that was intentionally and carefully pared down to its Okinawan roots by Sensei Alan Rench. Odayaka provides a well-rounded curriculum within that framework that focuses more heavily on individual training and the betterment of the self than on sport and competition. Odayaka has a very clear and easy-to-teach structure of basic kihon, kata and bogyu waza that directly correspond with belt levels. Odayaka also has requirements for internal training, such as meditation. However, it is also careful not to restrict students only to Shorei Ryu, and encourages, and in fact requires, dan-level students to obtain “other-than-Shorei” hours through study of other styles of martial arts, tournaments, seminars, and other such experiences.

As stated earlier, in the traditional sense, Karate and other traditional arts become a way of life for their practitioners. Serious students devote years of study and thousands of hours of practice in their chosen style(s). Although there are goals, they are personal goals and are unique to every practitioner. It is not necessary to attain dan-level for the training to be meaningful and beneficial. It is not necessary to win every sparring match, or any sparring match, in order to learn and improve one’s self. Although there is competition for those who desire it, it is not essential, and a practitioner who does not partake in competition can still experience the full benefit of his or her training. This type of inward-looking endeavor is sorely lacking in the modern day.

### **3. Longevity/Risks**

One of the great benefits of training in the traditional martial arts is the fact that they are intended to be practiced over an entire lifetime. An obvious but sometimes overlooked (or more accurately ignored) reality of many of the current mixed martial arts styles is the matter

of longevity in training. Many of the more modern styles are almost exclusively focused on the young and fit individual. The detrimental side effect of training in mixed martial arts is the common frequent, and often serious, body damage. This does not lend itself to long-term training and can significantly decrease quality of life in later years.

In his article for NJ.com, *MMA fighting: Inside look at the brutal sport's rising popularity and danger*, Matthew Stanmyre, interviewed and followed MMA fighters as they prepared for bouts. Their preparation included intense workouts, significant short-term weight loss/starvation, and other dangerous practices. In his article Stanmyre states:

Mixed martial arts, or simply MMA, is cage fighting that mixes punching, kicking and grappling. Likened to human cockfighting and blood sport by detractors, its intoxicating mix of athleticism, intensity and violence delivers something people have been lining up to see since Rome built the Colosseum.

Still in its infancy, MMA already has entrenched itself in popular culture. It is a success on pay-per-view and cable, and it has started to gain a foothold on network TV.

But hidden from the excitement of fight night is a jarring world few outsiders see. The training, preparation and sparring required before even stepping into the chain-link-enclosed cage is unlike anything in sports, including boxing.

Regardless, tens of thousands of men and women are flocking to gyms that are sprouting up like yogurt shops and nail salons in strip malls across the country. Inside, punches, kicks and knees are exchanged in training sessions that can turn more violent than blood-soaked fight nights. Some fighters spar three and four days a week and accept punishment beyond all conventional limits.

Despite its appeal and popularity, this type of training is simply not sustainable long-term and puts the health and at times the very lives of practitioners in danger. If serious injury is avoided, with very few exceptions this type of training could be continued into a person's 20s and 30s, but not long beyond that at a peak level of competition.

#### 4. Building character and respect for self and others.

The traditional arts are meant to be a way of life for the practitioner and are steeped in tradition and a very high level of respect for others, as well as respect for one's self and one's body. Many parents involve their children in the martial arts with the hope of instilling in them this deep sense of respect. Traditional sensei should expect, and in fact demand, that all students show a high level of respect for each other and their instructors.

Mike Massie in his article in *Martial Arts Business Daily* discusses the importance of building character and courtesy in children through martial arts.

The concept of teaching character has become nearly synonymous with teaching martial arts. For better or for worse, since the original Karate Kid movie released the public has held the image of benevolent, peace-loving, slightly cantankerous Mr. Miyagi to be the measure by which all children's martial arts instructors should be measured.

But just how important is it really to the success of your school that you teach positive values such as courtesy to your students? Isn't it enough to simply follow traditional rituals of bowing and calling instructors "sir", "ma'am", or sensei? Is it really necessary to do more?

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Sure, you can call it "self-defense" if you like, but without internal tempering the external skills of the martial arts are merely weaponry in the hands of any person. Just as a firearm knows no inherent ethics or morality, neither do the physical skills of the martial arts bear any of these traits either, no matter how much we wish to romanticize the arts we practice.

Parents were quick to pick up on this; I would imagine that it started the first time a kid used what they learned in class at school and the parents got a call from the principal. I can hear the parents complaining now: "I wanted you to teach him to be like Ralph Macchio, not those Cobra-Kai kids!" And, I'm sure that the first instructor who heard this complaint soon realized that the gravy train was going to leave the station if he didn't start instilling some character values into the kids in his classes.

Massie states that he has created "mat chat" in his dojo. He sets aside time in almost every class to verbally instruct his students on the virtues of respect, courtesy, etc. At times he does this both for the children in his school, and for the watching parents, who are able to see the lessons

being repeatedly taught. However, Massie brings up a very important point: by putting such emphasis on this aspect of the training, he himself is held to a higher standard. Therefore, he warns that an instructor must be careful to live up to what he or she is expecting from the students, both inside and outside of the dojo. He suggests serious self-evaluation to ensure that you are, in essence, practicing what you preach.

Observe how you conduct yourself in your interactions with others, and honestly evaluate whether or not you're living up to your lessons. Believe me, if you put yourself forth in your community as a person who is a role model for children, someone is always watching your every move in public.

Massie gives several practical examples of how easy it is to unwittingly violate your own rules:

Lose your cool and flip someone off in traffic? It'll probably be one of the parents who bring their children to your class...

Snap at the person who mixed up your order at that restaurant? You don't recognize him, but his nephews and nieces attend your school...

Plan to get sauced at the town festival? Don't even think about it...

Refuse to pay a bill with a local vendor? All her clients are likely to be your clients as well, and people talk...

My point here is that as a profession that has evolved into this sub-niche of teaching character development programs for children, we need to hold ourselves to a higher standard, or we risk losing our credibility as a profession entirely.

Although there is much on which to focus when teaching students, it is important to remember to frequently and regularly work in this important message, especially with younger students.

### **5. Martial arts' future. Changing perceptions.**

To maintain interest in training in traditional martial arts, one possibility is to blend it with overall wellness. Over the past several decades, Americans have become hyper-focused on physical and mental wellness, and this trend has reached levels never before seen. People flock to wellness retreats, to yoga seminars, to doctors and homeopaths for health advice, to

acupuncturists, to spas, and myriad other avenues to reach optimal wellness. In its recent report in February of 2017, The Nielson Company reported:

It's no surprise that many Americans aspire to live healthier lives. And while being healthy isn't a new trend, the way consumers manage their health is distinctly different from times past. Going to regularly scheduled doctor's visits, choosing careful diets and exercising throughout the week are still useful tactics in managing a healthy lifestyle, but many Americans today are much more mindful of other factors when it comes to managing their health, such as health care costs and alternative channels to seek care.

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So what sparked this shift? In recent years, health and wellness has elevated in importance for countless consumers, largely due to a convergence of factors, including rising health care costs and an aging population. Consumer health risks are also evolving. As Americans are living longer, chronic diseases are also on the rise.

People are looking for ways to stay healthy long-term, and the traditional martial arts are a perfect choice. In its article issued on October 23, 2017, entitled *Martial Arts Fitness*, FitnessHealth 101 strongly recommended training in martial arts to keep physically fit, with the added benefit of learning self-defense.

**Martial Arts** training is one of several physical activities that absolutely requires a **professional instructor** to ensure that the individual learns the proper form, techniques, movements, and balance of the art that they are practicing.

Many individuals choose martial arts for the same reasons as boxing - it can be used as a form of **self defense** and as a valuable **outlet for pent-up emotion, stress and anxiety**.

However, unlike boxing, martial arts is **relatively inexpensive to begin**, and most exercises require only the individual and an open space. There are many types of martial arts, and a person wishing to begin training should choose the one that best suits their physical and mental requirements.

The martial arts can easily tap into this trend of wellness and fitness. Extremely popular and long-lasting trends such as yoga pair extremely well with martial arts and can be marketed accordingly. In his article *The Beautiful Integration of Martial Arts and Yoga*, Pradeep Kumar

discusses the fact that martial arts and yoga have many similarities and share some of the same origins:

The art of yoga draws power from its roots which lie in the ancient Indian (Sanskrit) history. Martial arts, although varying in disciplines, all draw their effectiveness from similar principles as that of yoga. ....On the outside it might look like two opposite ends of one pole, however, if we take a closer look, it is safe to say that some components of martial arts were derived from yoga and that they complement each other in more ways than one.

When compared, both of these art forms have much more in common than one would think.

Kumar states that the commonalities include: mental focus, body movement, body awareness, breath, and the focus of energy; balance, the mastery of the core strength to hold the body steady through complicated movement; flexibility to permit the body to move freely, and of course, breath, the ability to properly and fully breathe, keeping oxygen moving through the body and the effective control of the breath to maximize energy and endurance. Using overall wellness as a marketing tool can be extremely valuable and can bring people in the door.

## **6. Providing effective self-defense training**

In recent years, interest in self-defense and safety has been increasing world-wide. It is essential to the longevity of a dojo to develop a heavier focus on self-defense/safety with more realistic, yet safe defense training.

In its post of November 28, 2012, *Where have all the Martial Artists Gone? Should we Blame MMA?* It stated:

If martial arts wishes to survive it needs to understand that in a poor economy with a rising crime rate the people are afraid. They are very interested in learning to protect themselves. They don't need flowery form, high minded ideals, and pretty ceremonies. They need to know how do I stop somebody from bashing my face in? This means focusing on real combat.

If the martial arts is to prosper it needs to adjust its handling of weapons accordingly. No more stiff straight thrusts. Learning to counter dynamic real world armed opponents is a key component now.

Although the martial arts obviously include many aspects of training, such as basic techniques, kata, and competition, one of the main reasons that people choose to study the martial arts, at least initially, is to learn self-defense. It is of vital importance that a dojo take self-defense very seriously and that practice of self-defenses is as realistic as possible. It does nothing but give students a false sense of security if self-defense is not taught well.

David Erath, Jr., provides practical and useful guidelines for self-defense in his Book, *The Ultimate Guide to Unarmed Self Defense*. He discusses the actual nature of physical violence, pointing out that, “Real violence is fast, dynamic, and chaotic,” which most people do not realize unless they have experienced or witnessed it. He describes an actual assault that was captured on surveillance a camera in front of his building to illustrate this point:

The woman was walking along the sidewalk when a truck stopped, a man got out, and ran at her. She froze for a moment in fear, and was tackled in a bear hug onto my concrete steps. As soon as she hit the steps the man was yelling and cursing at her, choking her, and slamming her head into the steps. He then dragged her into his truck and drove away.

The bear hug wasn't at all like bear hugs trained in most martial arts or self defense classes. It lasted almost one second, and was only used to slam the woman. The choke wasn't standing, and it wasn't on a flat surface where common counters are trained. Not only was the woman on an uneven surface, but she was getting her head repeatedly slammed into the steps and screamed at while being choked. This is what a real assault is like.

On his website, [FunctionalSelfDefense.org](http://FunctionalSelfDefense.org), Erath posted an article *Is Your Training Realistic?* in which he discusses that most martial arts self-defense training that he has studied is unrealistic and would not work in actual violent confrontations.

I get emails from people nearly every day who tell me that they agree with the material on my website. Yet when they send me video links or tell me about what they are doing, it usually turns out that they are practicing ineffectively themselves. They think that everyone else is practicing an inferior system, but their system is realistic. Their system has been around for centuries, it has stood

the test of time, it was created and used by a woman monk, it has been used on the battlefield, etc., etc. This is really unfortunate. Through training in a semi-cooperative environment, we humans are easily and quickly conditioned to believe that ineffective material works! It works in the training room, so we think it will work in reality. But what people fail to realize is that their training partners are only attacking in certain ways, that they aren't *really* resisting, that they aren't *really* being uncooperative.

**There are two things you must do in order to make sure your training is functional.** First, when you try your techniques, tell your training partner “don't let me do this”. You'll probably need to repeat it, as we naturally begin to cooperate with each other in training. Second, make sure that when you train it is nearly indistinguishable from when you spar. If the techniques and combinations you are training are not the same ones you're using when you're sparring, then there is a problem with the techniques, or a problem with how you are training them.

It is clear that it is of vital importance to practice realistic self-defense in martial arts training.

During regular classes students should be strongly encouraged to be as realistic in their attacks and defenses as safety will allow. Nothing less than this should be acceptable. The goal should be to instill automatic, effective defense responses in the students through intensive practice and repetition. One effective method for realistic self-defense training is to have one very heavily padded black belt, or higher-ranking kyu, act as the attacker so that students can use more targeted and realistic defensive maneuvers against him or her.

#### **7. Keeping students. Marketing and involving students in their training. Involving and motivating students for the long-run necessary to succeed in the traditional arts.**

Retaining students is an ongoing problem for most dojo. In his article *Are Your Students Draining Away?*, Christopher Caile indicates that a dojo is doing well if they are losing less than 1/3 to 2/5 of its students each year. Caile suggests many ideas for retaining students, some of which are as follows:

- Find out why students are interested in training in the first place. What brought them in the door?
- Make sure you are meeting that expectation or need.

- Ask students who leave, why they left. This might uncover problems or personal conflicts that might be rectified. It will also guide you as to how to teach and conduct your classes better.
- Add classes or extra days when you hold classes. Scheduling conflicts lose a lot of students or potential ones.
- Make classes interesting. Always add exciting, interesting elements to your teaching. Explain a kata technique, show a unique self-defense move, explain a principle of movement or technique, tell interesting stories about your teachers or great masters. Sit down with your students and encourage them to ask questions. Some of these might be reserved for the end of the class or afterwards, but some are easily added into the class curriculum.
- Minimize injury and fear. A lot of seasoned martial artists forget the fear and intimidation of their first martial arts classes. Also, pain and injury will quickly discourage many, especially those who are weaker or less physically able. A good idea, if you are a karate school, is to put off kumite for a while and teach people all the elements of fighting first. Then wear safety equipment and stress safety in class.
- Build a positive student relationship with each student. Know all your student's names. Take an opportunity to get to know each student in your class and something about them. Be supportive, encourage your students and complement them when they have done something well. This works much better than repeated criticism, because no matter how well intended, repeated criticism can wound your student's ego and concept of worth. It can also drive them away.
- Monitor your students. If you teach a class be careful to notice any problems, seeming disinterest, or poor attendance. Talk to the student, let the student know you think he or she is important. Try to find out what is happening and how to remedy a situation if it is deteriorating.
- Ask for a commitment. If students enroll to achieve some objective (and you should know this), let them know that it takes time and dedication to achieve it. Tell them that you will teach them, but ask for their commitment in return, for without it, their goals are meaningless. As part of this you might ask them to commit for a specific time period. You may decide to use contracts.
- Use of agreements to commit your students to study. These are contracts, but it is better to call them agreements because the word "contract" can scare a lot of potential students away. Explain to the potential student that the agreement is useful since it spells out his or her costs, as well as their commitment. You can also offer discounts, if the student commits for a year or longer.
- Build appreciation on a different, more meaningful level. Let students and potential students know why your school is different from health clubs or other sports and activities.

Let them know that what you teach is much more than a martial art -- it can help them improve themselves, build discipline, confidence, grow stronger and learn how to deal with problems. Your students may never have to defend themselves, but their martial arts can affect their lives, their families, and how they deal with others. Let them know this. Also, be sure to explain to parents how your martial arts program can benefit their kids.

- Hold annual ceremonies, school events, special training or seminars -- any number of things to create a community around your school. This builds a social foundation to support your martial arts teaching.

Not all of these ideas will work for every dojo, of course. However, individual attention is important, and each student should have one-on-one time with an instructor on a regular basis. Keeping students actively involved in their training is essential to retaining interest and enthusiasm. It can be invaluable to set aside time with each student and review with him or her individual goals, strengths and weaknesses, progress, and timelines. It is helpful to write out the goals so that you each have a copy and to encourage all students to check in regularly to ensure they are on track to meet their goals.

Sensei Paul A. Walker in his editorial, *How Karate Instructors can Motivate their Students in Three Easy Steps*, discusses how to keep students enthusiastic and engaged in their training. He discusses how most dojo have a very wide range in ages in their student bodies, which are comprised of a few basic types: the highly motivated, “gung-ho” students who tend to be very competitive; the hobbyists, who have a more balanced perspective, and those who want a black belt, but fail to understand the work it takes to achieve that goal. In order to motivate all of these various students, Sensei Walker provides three steps:

1. Set your students up for success

As human beings we all need to feel like we are being successful. We like our efforts to be recognized and we seek approval from those whom we respect. Your karate students are no different. Positive praise produces positive progress.

There is nothing more powerful than a genuine comment from you that praises something about your student's effort in class or their recent improvement. We've

all heard the phrase "people don't care how much you know until they know how much you care." Show your students that you genuinely care about them and that you truly want the best for them in their training.

## 2. Disguise repetition

Repetition is the mother of skill but at the same time one definition of madness is doing the same thing over and over again with the expectation of different results. As a karate instructor your job is to make sure that your students' skill level is constantly improving through repetition while making it seem to them as if they are constantly learning something new each lesson.

This is achieved by developing multiple drills and teaching techniques that focus on the same core competencies that are needed to grow as a martial artist. By doing this your students will always look forward to coming to class because they will be excited to see what they will be studying that day. Repeating the same lesson in the same way over and over is a sure recipe for low student retention.

## 3. Implement an effective ranking system

The path to black belt is a long and arduous journey and the majority of students won't make it. Therefore it is necessary to recognize the importance of an effective ranking system so that your students have regular "success stepping stones". These "success stepping stones" are your different colored belts.

Make sure that you have a clear belt system that students can strive for with regular testing - usually every three months. However be careful not to overwhelm your students with multiple stripes and sub-ranks that only serve to confuse them even more. Keep it simple and clear so that students know exactly what is expected of them.

Kicksite.net, in its post on August 18, 2014, *Value of Martial arts, How to be a Better Teacher/Mentor, General Business Acumen*, also suggested several ways to keep students motivated. It mentions like in many other endeavors, it is typical for students to start out motivated and enthusiastic, only to lose those feelings within a few weeks or months and drop out. It states that this is a source of frustration for dojo owners, since success obviously depends on the number of paying students. This article cited Arrowhead Martial Arts, which offered some suggestions, including one-on-one attention/monitoring of students, as was discussed previously; however, it also suggested helping students set a routine:

**Highlight the importance of setting a routine:** People are creatures of routine. It doesn't really take a whole lot of time to establish a routine. Most experts feel this can be accomplished in a little as two or three weeks. For martial arts school owners, this is a pivotal time, especially for new enrollees. Encouraging students to stick to a routine that includes class participation will help keep enrollment numbers static and not fluid.

This article also referred to an article written for LinkedIn by former U.S. Army Officer Benjamin Moriniere, in which he suggested:

One of the best suggestions is to reward students who do well. Everyone likes to be recognized for a job well done, but this is especially important in such a demanding task as martial arts training. By offering incentives for performance that can be presented in front of a class, it can serve as a great inspiration for the student receiving the recognition while also being a goal for other students to strive for.

Another helpful suggestion is to use videos that serve as a form of inspiration. Some of the best would be to film classes and track the progress of those students who were inexperienced in martial arts when they first started training to highlight their level of proficiency in the disciplines being taught. This can help any student – particularly beginners – feel as if they can achieve mastery of the martial arts as well.

On October 22, 2014, this site posted another article entitled, *How to be a better teacher/mentor, Value of Martial Arts*. This article raised additional useful motivational techniques for martial arts instructors:

- Set expectations: Many first-time karate or taekwondo students think Bruce Lee became the master he was overnight. Those teaching martial arts classes should be honest and inform students that there will be both good and bad days, but it's important to remain focused on the reasons they signed up for self-defense classes in the first place.
- Demand excellence: According to TeachHub, students won't perform up to their capabilities on their own. As a martial arts instructor, it's up to you to set the expectation in class that nothing less than an individual's best will be expected.
- Instill discipline: Today, particularly with the advent and explosion of technology, attention spans are shorter than ever. For martial arts teachers that have classes full of children, demanding that they concentrate and focus at all times during class will instill a sense of discipline that will carry over into their daily lives, according to Allegheny College.

- Make instruction relatable: According to TeachHub, it's important for instructors to help students understand that what they are learning during their martial arts classes can also be applied in their daily lives once instruction ends. Doing so will not only help to instill a sense of self-confidence, but it will make them hungry to learn even more.

All of these ideas are valuable and can be incorporated into a dojo's curriculum.

In this era of the Internet and social media, it is also heartening to see that there are some younger karateka who are using YouTube, Facebook, their own websites, and skillful marketing to draw interest to the traditional martial arts. Two young men, Aaron Garcia and Michael Nyugen, created a website, Karateculture.com, where they post useful information and videos which focus on the practical applications of traditional karate, including the realistic use of kata. Jesse Enkamp, whose article on McDojos was mentioned earlier, and who has labeled himself "The Karate Nerd," maintains an interesting and appealing website, and issues YouTube videos regularly that are not only engaging and entertaining, but contain very useful information for karate practitioners of all styles. For a young man in his 20s, Enkamp, who has trained from a very early age in his parents' dojo in Sweden, has amassed an impressive body of knowledge in many forms of the traditional arts, having studied in both Japan and Okinawa. He travels extensively and holds seminars all over the world, frequently sharing videos of his trips. He has also interviewed and held seminars with Patrick McCarthy, a well-known authority on the martial arts. Steering students towards these types of resources, especially younger students, can be invaluable in maintaining their interest.

## **7. Conclusion**

In researching for this project I came across a great deal of interesting and valuable information. I gained a greater understanding of how the traditional arts have become overshadowed by more flashy and extreme styles and why. I have become even more determined

not to fall into the trap of playing to some students' potential expectations of immediate gratification and reward and to instead attempt to show them the benefits of focused, long-term training and keep our dojo true to its roots. I plan to talk to students in my group about their personal reasons for training and help them develop and attain short-term and long-term goals.

I was also reminded of the importance of instilling respect and courtesy in students and reminding them on a regular basis that this aspect of their training, being a better person, is just as important, if not in some respects more important, as their physical training. I intend to discuss this more often with students, and to get their feedback and ideas as to how to make this more of a focus in their lives. What was perhaps even more valuable to me personally was the reminder to hold myself to the same standards that I expect from students. That is a very obvious but very easy thing to forget, yet it is extremely important. We cannot demand respect from our students if we do not behave in a respectful and courteous manner ourselves. It was also extremely eye-opening to be reminded that the way we comport ourselves outside of the dojo can have either a beneficial, or adverse, effect on the dojo itself.

In my teaching I also plan to spend more time on self-defenses and in making that training as realistic and useful as possible, while maintaining safety. I may incorporate more drills with heavier gear, such as the chest pads and shin guards, in order enable students to practice techniques more realistically.

I also plan to try to improve my teaching style by focusing more on praise rather than criticism, which I also read about in my research. I have noticed that, especially when I teach in the children's class, the students sometimes respond better to that manner of teaching. I would like to become more adept at making praise my go-to response, and then follow up with

suggested improvements. I would also like to work on more variety when I teach, using some of the suggestions in the articles I found, to keep the students more interested.

Using some of the information I discovered while working on this project, I am both hopeful and confident that I will be able to improve my teaching skills and to teach in a manner that keeps students' interest in the traditional training alive and well.

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