

Keeping Interest. To Help Reduce the loss of Students.

Mr Kevin Cale

2008: New Registrations: 787. of these 88% Reregistered in 2009 : 694

2009: New Registrations: 1152. of these 77% Reregistered in 2010 : 890

2010: New Registrations: 962 (2011 re-registrations tend to come in a rush later in April, for the AGM)*

With retention numbers like these our art should be growing better than it is and it is apparent that we are still losing a large number of students.

I would like to offer my observations and my attempts to keep the number of those leaving to an absolute minimum.

With our chosen martial art, the question of how do you keep people who join interested has often been asked.

Mr. Breen's essay in 1995 gave a lot of valid pointers to what will help and most is still relevant for today.

People join for a number of very varied reasons; the prestige of becoming a black belt has to be rated very high for those young and naïve.

Fitness, confidence, self defence and being able to protect ones self are all other good reasons. Those who bring their children along are soon members of the club training and going onto grade. At Te Karaka we have 9 registered adults. All of them have brought children along and then gone on to become club members themselves. This is usually because of the family environment generated at our club. This is one third of our clubs members. It would be interesting to find out the percentage of parents at other clubs but that is another essay.

With such a large number of reasons for these people who come along it then becomes the challenge of the instructor and his or her assistants to keep them interested and coming back.

Sitting down with each person and getting to know them, asking them what they like about what they are doing and what they want to achieve can give great insight into what will keep people interested.

This will become more difficult with the larger number of students you have to work with. But not impossible.

I have found that once you have their reasons for being at training on a regular basis you have an opportunity to maintain a low level of attrition with students.

You will always have those who will fall by the way side because it becomes too difficult! It is no longer what they want to do with their time. Those you can expect to lose anyway, no matter what you do they will leave. This should be only a small number though.

Those who leave because they go off to university or move town. Your club may lose them but by giving them the details of the club nearest to where they are going will keep them within our organization.

By learning the warning signs of a potential leaver will also give you the opportunity to ensure that you have done everything to keep a student. The tell tail signs usually start with lack of enthusiasm to train. Then, irregular attendance will closely be followed by non-attendance and departure.

In my experience the two most likely times for a student to stop is between blue stripe to red stripe and after 1st dan has been achieved.

Students at blue stripe to red stripe become frustrated. The instructor is asking for more from the student in the way of correct techniques in patterns that are becoming more difficult. I am expecting the students to be practicing at home on their own and of course when a student is held back from a grading. This can be because they need more time, more practice or have just not mastered what is required to take their next grading.

It is imperative the instructor knows what motivates them and by bringing the student back to his or her reason for being there will often get the student re-motivated and putting in the extra effort required. Keeping their mind focused on what it is they want to achieve has helped me as an instructor immensely. Keeping a very varied and motivated club training will challenge each student too.

When a students shows the first sign of not enjoying training I always ask if everything is alright at training, home and school. This gives my students the opportunity to say if they are losing interest and why.

If things don't change I ask them again if everything is OK and also advise them that I have noticed a change in the way they are training and also ask at this point if why the reason they are at training has changed. Everything then depends on their response.

I have then had to adapt what I am doing and why to give the best chance I have to help them and keep them as a participating student.

I remember blue to black belt being some of the more challenging times for me and my daughter and also my second daughter who is currently at red stripe.

By asking my red stripes and above to take a newer student and help them with a part of their development does a number of things.

1. It gives the senior student responsibility and gives them the determination to show they know what they are doing.
2. It allows the senior student to bring what they like about Taekwon Do to that part of the lesson.
3. It shows those green and blue belt students that as we are all individuals and we are likely to be at training for varied reasons.

When a student is at red belt and black stripe I believe it is the time to get them to start looking at what it is they wish to do after they achieve their black belt. By making them focus on black belt as just another stepping-stone in their Taekwon-Do achievements (although a large one).

Most younger people will feel depleted and exhausted after they have achieved 1st Dan. I have heard the phrase "I am all TKD'd out" used many times. Unless they know what is next most will drift onto something else after a long break.

In summary these are the five bullet points I believe will help any instructor from losing more students than they have to.

1. Know your student and know what they want from being at the club. Take the time to get to know your student. Find out what their likes and dislikes with Taekwon-Do are and adapt training as much as possible to their likes.
 2. Keep training sessions achievable entertaining and focused. By taking yourself as an instructor to as many other clubs as possible will give you insights into how other instructors operate. It will give you many new and varied ideas about training. This will allow you to keep training sessions fresh, achievable and entertaining.
 3. Recognize the warning signs of a potential student that may be losing interest and heart and refocus them on why they are coming. Warning signs are usually the same no matter the student. A distinct lack of motivation at training will soon be followed by intermittent attendance. If the instructor miss's misses this opportunity to talk to the student then the next stage will be non attendance.
 4. Set goals with your students and help them achieve those goals. Setting goals is very easy with students and can be as simple as getting the correct technique or achieving their next grading level. Don't forget to give plenty of recognition and praise when a goal is achieved.
 5. Be the best you can be as an instructor. For me, this means having clear and defined goals for what I want to achieve with my Taekwon-Do. I have tried to ensure that when teaching an aspect of Taekwon-Do you get the best person qualified to do that teaching. This means Mr. Michael and Mr. Simon Davis teaching sparring. (both NZ world team members for sparring). Master Rimmer is only a four hour drive and when I can train with those in Tauranga I do so that when I pass on information from those lessons to my students I know I am passing it on from the best source I can. I do not profess to know everything and can not even hope to remember everything I am taught but when asked a question from a student I don't know the answer to I will not bluff my way through, I will go to the encyclopedia and the student and I will get the answer together. When offered the opportunity to have extra training I will do everything I possibly can to be there. I often envy those who have the opportunity to train with great instructors but just don't.
- *Numbers supplied by Mike Thompson. CEO International Taekwon-do New Zealand.*