

## Loyalty and Taekwon-Do

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I found this topic thought-provoking and I reflected on my own experiences as well as those of my students who have struggled with loyalty to their previous Instructors and schools. Society these days has clearly evolved from one of traditional, moral and ethical values, to one of freedom, flexibility and openness with less importance attached to traditional values. This has also led to a fast pace lifestyle by filling our lives. With an abundance of work, family, sporting and career ambitions, we have very little time to relax, take stock of our lives and reflect on the impact our actions have on others. With so many options to choose from in terms of interest clubs, martial arts, sporting codes, and hobbies, how can one person decide on a path for themselves, when you are given so many choices and opportunities?

In terms of loyalty, in sporting codes such as football for example, to play for one club participants are required to sign an agreement not to play for another club. Rugby Union players in New Zealand are not allowed to participate in other international leagues without prior approval as that would jeopardise their right to play for our country. These two examples are an *imposed* loyalty to their clubs or country through the use of some kind of pressure or duress. Taekwon-Do students changing schools can be seen as being disloyal to their school and Instructor for leaving to go to a school more suitable for themselves. Taekwon-Do and the modern day Instructor must define loyalty through its unique status as an art and a sport. Beginning students start training without any knowledge of the fundamental loyalty in Taekwon-Do.

I started Taekwon-Do in 1996 at the age of 13 years at Papatoetoe Taekwon-Do, now known as Dragons Spirit Papatoetoe. The Instructor I began under (Mr Sam Clark) no longer trains or runs a school. I moved several times while studying medicine, firstly in Dunedin at Otago University, then to Wellington, followed by Hawkes Bay, with the final destination back in Auckland. I was away from Auckland for six years, and over that period I made leaps and bounds in my Taekwon-Do career. Throughout that time, I met amazing people some of whom were my Instructors and became life-long friends.

On arrival back to Auckland in 2005 as a 3<sup>rd</sup> Dan, I was a completely different person from the one who had left. I had a fresh perspective and ambition, and I wanted to create something special through the art of Taekwon-Do, which had helped shape me and my life choices. Always the studious and disciplined person, Taekwon-Do also gave me the courage and the desire to help the community through this art that had become ingrained in me. I knew how I wanted to teach Taekwon-Do. Thus began the idea of a new school, which is presently co-instructed with my sister, Chanthie. Now, eight years later, we run a successful school, have implemented many community initiatives, and created a fantastic training environment for our students. Our students are our friends, our school is our home, and we are a family unit. This is evident in the environment that we have created in our school, both within the do-jang and outside it. I know our students respect us and loyalty is mutually given and received.

My life and the pathways that I have chosen at each crossroad, brought me to many different schools but arguably strengthened my resolve and loyalty to Taekwon-Do. This essay is part of the 5<sup>th</sup> degree black belt grading requirements. It is 14 years since I left my original school. It will be a privilege to be grading at the very place that was my first Taekwon-Do home, with my sister and one of my foundational Instructors.

The topic poses many questions but the theme I would like to discuss is loyalty and the Taekwon-Do student: How can a student be taught the moral loyalty? Why do students change schools? How do we as Instructors respond to a request for change? Loyalty, and thus student retention, plays a larger part in the sustainability of one's school and the organisation as a whole.

I believe as Instructors we play a huge and vital role in our students' lives. Our students see us as teachers, mentors, guides, friends, family and more. Not only do we teach a martial art, we have the responsibility of developing our students to become martial artists themselves, and the student oath is the fundamental building block in the students' development. As Instructors, we are the students' role model; what we say, what we do, and the way we do it will set an example and will influence the student, both passively and actively, in how they decide to conduct themselves. Hence, loyalty is displayed on an on-going basis unknowingly, and the phrases "you reap what you sow" and "what goes around comes around" are most appropriate.

New students to our art need to be taught the moral loyalty. One way of developing a sense of loyalty is through a feeling or sense of belonging - it's very hard, if not impossible to feel any loyalty to a thing or a person if you do not have that feeling of belonging. Much of the sense of belonging is developed by the "inclusive" nature of the school; involving many people in the planning, the thinking, and the delivery of the activities of the school. This could be seen as merely spreading the load, but it goes deeper than that; the inclusive nature of the school involves other activities, social evenings and outings, and fundraising and marketing events. Then there are the other more-Taekwon-Do focussed events that take place, which are way beyond the weekly training sessions, such as the training weekends away. Loyalty is earned, loyalty requires a true sense of belonging, a sense of belonging is engendered through the development of an inclusive environment, one where there is a dialogue, not a monologue.

If a student decides to change school and move to a different school within the same region, labelling a student disloyal would be unfair and unjust if they had valid reasons to do so. This not only creates tension and a judgement of the student's character but this implies an assumption that the students are in the wrong and the onus is on them to make the correct and proper decision on where their loyalty lies. However, if the student felt loyal to the Instructor and the school, and the Instructor-Student relationship is based on honesty and trust, a student would be able to discuss their reasons for leaving the school, and then if deemed acceptable, they should be able to part ways on good terms, with a mutual respect for one another. However, given the hierarchal nature of our art and its structure, junior students may feel it is not their place to judge or question the teachings and ways of an Instructor and thus a dynamic relationship cannot exist if the infrastructure does not allow this process to happen.

Our school, like any school, experiences transfer requests both in and out of the school. Younger children are guided by their parents due to factors such as location, costs, and suitable times for their family; older students transfer for study, work, and other re-location reasons. However, it is the more controversial transfers that I would like to address when transferring to train at what the student sees as a better school for themselves and the Instructor is left to ponder why. We have very few of these transfers out and we more see transfers in to the school. When this happens, we encourage the students to discuss the reasons for transfers with their Instructors and to help develop a mutual understanding of the issues and perhaps reconciliation can happen which may lead to the prevention of the transfer and a healthy Instructor-Student relationship.

An Instructor needs to develop an awareness of the student's training progress or lack thereof and review if the current school running structure needs to be re-evaluated to enable the retention of that student.

Society is continually moulded by fresh perspectives and the new generation that is coming through; we need to be aware of how this affects the school, to encourage input from our students, and to develop a mutual respect. This requires that we keep an open mind to the evolving society and change with the times.

In conclusion, a healthy Instructor-Student relationship is the key to helping teach a student to understand the meaning of loyalty and respect, and Instructors have to uphold that responsibility and guide the students in their journey in developing them as martial artists. Open and honest communication and developing a training environment that is conducive to the student's learning and providing a positive experience enables the student to stay loyal to the Instructor, School and Art.