

Recruitment and retention of students for Taekwon-Do clubs

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Introduction

Establishing a stable membership base is crucial to the longevity and success of your Tae Kwon-Do club, as without this, a clubs operation could not be sustained in the long term.

Students contribute not only financial, but valuable human resources. They also enhance the clubs environment with enthusiasm, energy, fresh ideas, and the continuance of the organisations long term objectives.

This paper will provide an overview, from my perspective of how to recruit and retain members within a club.

Recruiting Taekwon-do Students

If clubs are to attract new students they need to have a well-developed structure in place and identify what influences people when joining a club.

Why join your club?

There are a variety of reasons why people may choose to join:

- Location/convenience
- Club reputation/success
- Social aspects
- Family involvement
- Club Size
- Facilities
- Peer pressure
- To improve skills, fitness, flexibility or learn how to better protect themselves

Identifying potential students

Before developing a strategy for recruiting students it is helpful to determine where the potential is likely to come from and the best means to attract the respective groups to your club.

- **Active Students:** These are students who are currently training with a club but looking for a new club to move to. They may be new to the area or want to be part of a more or less competitive environment. Your club may have a junior class, or a more convenient

practice time. Your club location may be more practical than their current club (i.e. on the way home from work).

To recruit these students you need to publicise and lift the awareness by advertising on local/community notice boards, at the local gym, the local paper or live demonstrations at events where you have a captive audience. Place a sign on the fence near your club location, or make use of a simple mailbox drop to houses within the catchment area. Ensure that the itkd website is displayed wherever possible, as this is very effective in providing a simple means to make contact with your club.

- **Non-Active Students:** These are students whose work or other obligations do not permit regular team commitment. They are perhaps people who used to train in their youth and may want to be involved in the sport again, and require some encouragement or prompting.

In order to recruit these students give them the opportunity to come and participate at no-charge, where possible as they are more likely to come along if there risk or investment is minimal. Host an open day at your club with existing students, have a BBQ and a demonstration. Another suggestion to engage these students, would be to setup a registration desk at regional tournaments with interactive materials (video footage, photos, and breaking materials).

From personal observation there appears to be a student dropout rate after blue belt and again at 1st Dan black, by identifying when and why this occurs by way of a type of exit interview will help us understand and enable possible preventative measures before students become “non-active”.

- **Non-practitioners:** These are people who have no prior Taekwon-Do experience but are interested in learning a martial art.

An effective way to get these people involved is through a “Have a go” type program where people are able to “Try before they buy”. Schools, Community/interest groups are great resources through which you can tap into these potential members. Offer to run holiday program or after school sessions through either the schools or local youth and community groups.

Teachers at the local school can assist with promoting the sport and your club; hence it is valuable to have a key contact within each local school to both encourage the students to participate and to raise the awareness of the organisation.

Other suggestions to incorporate into your pool of recruitment tools may include:

- **Reward referrals.** Offer incentives to students for referral of new students, it doesn't have to be an expensive reward, keep it simple but ensure it's a desirable reward for students of all ages. It's sometimes all the motivation they need to help contribute time to the club

and help grow the membership base. Your current students have regular family, friends and colleagues they are continuously in contact with, many of whom are potential students.

- Align yourself with a charity or outside organisation. By helping to raise money for charity or other not-for-profit organisation, you not only help a good cause, but expose your club to plenty of free, positive publicity and exposure. Hold a kick-a-thon, do a demonstration, have a break-a-thon or think up your own exciting charity event. Its important to maintain the exposure and support with your selected charity of organisation, as repetition will breed familiarity for people interested in joining a martial art.

- Target your local gyms. Gym-goers are a captive audience; they are already interested in improving their lives through fitness and exercise. Place posters or flyers at various locations throughout the gym, including the main noticeboards. You'll be surprised at the number of people who do stop to take the time to read these boards. Ensure you have a simple method for them to obtain the information, have tear-off strips with contain your club information or a basic low-cost card option. Ensure you offer an incentive to get these people along to a class, offer the first 3 lessons free or join on the day. As an alternative to noticeboards, gym websites provide great exposure, although costs can be prohibitive for many clubs, if an mutual arrangement can be made with your club and the gym, include a link on the site to your club.
- Online social network sites. There is a vast array of social network tools available to us where we can obtain a lot of exposure without the cost. The likes of twitter, facebook and youtube are very popular vehicles to gain access to a very large group of people.

Having identified the potential students with suggestions on methods to recruit them, it is important that the club displays a positive atmosphere towards new recruits and makes them feel welcome in the club. Ensure that membership details and training times are readily available to give to your new students. You may want to assign someone to look after a new junior student (buddy system) until they are more familiar with the club and its surroundings. Have the basic rules of the dojang explained so they are aware of what's expected of them as first time students.

Challenges that clubs may be unaware of may make it difficult for a club to retain students and finding ways to overcome these challenges will increase student retention. These challenges include:

- Overcrowded classes or venue size not sufficient for student capacity
- Insufficient practice time
- Lack of quality teaching

- Inflexible or inconvenient practice times
- Lack of transport/ inconvenient transport
- Unaffordable membership fees
- Failure to actively involve students
- In sufficient class number (lack of atmosphere)

Retaining your Students

It is often too easy to focus solely on the recruitment of students without taking the time to think about how you will keep them there in the years to come.

- Involvement is key to student retention. Regardless of how impressive your club facilities, or equipment, your students have no attachment to it. What keeps them interested in a club is a high degree of involvement and a sense of belonging to the club. Involvement can include teaching, coaching, mentoring, responsibilities, accountability of tasks or other students, making them feel a part of the club and valued by way of contribution or participation. Encouraging students to participate in regional competitions are a good stepping stone to getting involved in the organisation, outside the class.
- Warning signs. A clear sign that a student is at risk of leaving is when they stop attending your club as often as they used to. By keeping tabs on attendance rates, you can spot at-risk students and see if you can find ways to minimise the likelihood of them leaving. There are often many reasons, and more often than not students are more than just practitioners of Taekwon-do. They are also parents, school students, university students, and full time employees. A good prompt would be to send a quick email or call to ask “hey is everything ok”
- Ensure variety and interest. Having a good plan lesson with variety and interest will help maintain the students attention. Vary the class content regularly, perhaps incorporate music to a portion of the lesson, or as I had witnessed at a club recently, a gong when sounded all students stop what they are doing for 20 quick push-ups and sit ups.

- Increasing the competitiveness. Many students join a sport for the competition, and Taekwon-do is no different. Competition encourages healthy spirit, personal development, and teaches the value of giving your best effort. Attempt to find ways to get your students interested in all aspects class, a good old fashioned brainstorm session with your senior members could bring about some great ideas or suggestions on how to do this.
- Don't forget the juniors. Having junior students within your club often breeds loyalty and also strengthens the club in the long term. A sound pathway will provide junior students with the opportunity to develop their skills and excel to an elite level. This will give the club more structure, and also assist in retaining students

- Utilise your senior belts. Encourage black belts to take a more active part in the teaching of junior students. This encourages involvement from black belts and provides junior students variety from a teaching perspective.

- Take the time to get to know new students. Building a healthy relationship will help the new student feel welcomed and in the long term fosters positive atmosphere and commitment within the club. Organise or encourage regular social functions
- Communicate. You may be surprised to know that the majority of your students communicate in a different style to you. Modify your communication with different styles to engage the student:
- Written – this student learns best when information is presented in written form such as that presented in the patterns book or encyclopaedia.
- Visual – This student learns best when information is presented visually such as demonstrating a technique
- Auditory – this student learns best when information is presented in an oral language format, such as describing a technique
- Tactile – this student learns best when physically engaged in a “hands-on” activity and learn from experiencing.

Students who are dedicated, active, and motivated, support the effective functioning of the club and are likely to attract new students.

While it may seem obvious to implement the ideas mentioned, you will want to ensure you do not undo all your hard efforts. Therefore it is wise to avoid the following:

- Not starting the class on time.
- Inhibiting creativity and new ideas
- Not paying attention to group dynamics
- Not following through with plans
- Failing to observe the student instructor obligations
- Not keeping students well informed about the happenings in the club or changes

In summary, before you commence a recruitment programme, identify who your potential market is and where they will come from. Identify the best means to get in front of the groups and utilise the resources available to you, which will include current students of family and friends.

Once you have your recruitment process underway, ensure you don't lose sight of retaining these students as they come on board. Induct them into the class so they feel a sense of belonging, younger students may need more help with this as the whole experience may be initially quite daunting. Keep them actively involved from the start as this will pave the way for long term commitment to the club.

Regularly implement the suggestions which fit with your club to retain students for instance fully utilise black belts, maintain interest with variety, take the time to get to know your students and make them feel inclusive. Be quick to act on tell-tale signs of non-interest with a call or email to check that everything is ok, students have busy lives outside of Taekwon-do and often it's just a matter of timing and priorities to get them back on track.

Last but not least, do not undo all your hardwork by not following through with your clubs obligations and promise to the student, start lessons on time, encourage fresh ideas and suggestions, keep them updated and informed but most importantly keep students involved.

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