

The Pressures of Taekwon-Do

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Introduction

This document may not sit right with a lot of it's readers, because a lot of the things I am going to talk about are of a personal nature and you as the reader might ask yourself, who am I to say these things? Please remember when reading this, that what I say is only my views that I have reached through my experiences in Taekwon-Do and in life.

On that note I think you should know a little bit about me, then when you have read this you can make your own mind up and come to your own views on the subject I am talking about.

Personal Detail

I am thirty-six years old and I have been married for thirteen years.

My wife Diane and I have one child, Daniel, who now is nine years old.

I have worked as a prison officer for the past thirteen years,

I have been involved in Taekwon –Do for twelve years.

I was brought up on a farm in the Waikato district in New Zealand. Since leaving school at the age of Fifteen until starting in the prison service, I have had several jobs, all of, which involved other people working with me or in my charge, e.g. shearing gangs, the NZ army, or the District Council.

Since starting in the prison service I have completed various exams in human behavior and psychology.

In Taekwon-Do

I started Taekwon-Do in 1986, with Mr. Evan Davidson (6th Dan) as my instructor at the Te Awamutu club. I sat my 1st Dan at Auckland in 1991 and my 2nd Dan at Tauranga in 1997. With the help from Mr. Davidson and Mr. Rimmer I started the Waikeria club in 1996 which is part of the Wai-Bop cell and is still going strong to this day.

Until I became an instructor. I never really thought about the pressure's that an art like Taekwon-Do can have in one's life. Dealing on a more personal level with my students and there families made think that there is more to Taekwon-Do than turning up for class twice a week, which is what brings me to this study.

Contents

My philosophy on the pressures of Taekwon-do

External Pressures

Physical Pressures

Psychological Pressures

Definition of the word pressure

In the English dictionary the word pressure is defined as follows,

Act of pressure

Influence

Authority

Difficulties

My philosophy on the pressures of Taekwon-Do

Before I go in to the different types of pressure Taekwon-do can pose in one's life I would like to say, that the word pressure sounds like a negative word, but I feel that not all pressures are negative. In fact some pressures can be very positive, creating stress, which in turn can stimulate the mind and body to achieve goals that one might have thought impossible to reach, therefore inducing a healthy mind and body.

Philosophy is a person's opinion on a subject; in this case the subject is the pressure of Taekwon-Do. My opinion will differ from most others because of how I perceive things that happen around my every day life and me.

For me, the easiest way to explain how I see things is to look at life as a highway.

When we are born we are given a vehicle (our bodies) to travel the highway of life.

This highway is one straight road from birth to death, which has hundreds of off ramps for people to take if they choose to. Each of these off ramps leads to a different stage to the highway of life and depending on which off ramp is taken, determines how long the journey of life is going to be.

In my case, in 1986 I was travelling up the highway of life with my family. We had taken the odd off ramp on our way but never strayed too far from the main highway.

As I was driving along, I saw a sign saying Taekwon-do next off ramp, so I decided to have a look.

On this road of Taekwon-Do I have met others on the same road, and it has taken me to places that I thought I would never see. On the same road though I have come across many roadblocks and sharp corners (pressures) which I've had to take slowly to avoid running off the road, which I'm sure most others on this road have come across as well.

I don't think that the pressures we come across on our travels are a problem.

I feel that it is the way that we deal with these pressures that will determent how long we stay on the Taekwon-do road.

External Pressures

There is much external pressure that can affect a student and that student's training. These can not only affect the student (be it good or bad) but they can also affect the people in the student's life, e.g. other students, parents and family members, friends, and the student's instructor.

External pressures often change in one's life, as you cope with one pressure, another will appear.

They can also vary from one person to another, depending on age, sex, and life styles.

External pressure is pressure that is created from an outside influence that could affect performance, such as families, friends, time, school, other activities e.g. sports, hobbies finance.

To probe a little further into how these external pressures can affect a Taekwon-Do student.

Time

Time is one of those things that there never seems to be enough of.

When a person starts Taekwon-do, they are normally told that training times are two nights a week for one and half-hours per session. Now one and a half-hours twice a week doesn't sound that bad.

Depending on the location of the club, some students could have to travel up to half an hour each way to and from training. And then the instructor asked the students to be in class ten to fifteen minutes before training starts, so 3 hours a week has all of a sudden turned to 5 hours a week.

This is fine for beginners, but as most instructors know, as a student progresses, that student needs to train more to be able to meet grading requirements and the ideal time required in order to achieve this should be at least $\frac{1}{2}$ an hour a day. If this happens, then for colored belts, this means that about $9\frac{1}{2}$ hours a week is taken up in Taekwon-do.

We can't forget also that time is all dependent on the person. Everyone has other commitments in their lives, be it school, work, family or other activities.

All the above factors make our time valuable so finding time to practice Taekwon-do can become a pressure. This all seems pretty negative, but I believe that training in Taekwon-do helps a person better arrange their time in order to achieve their goals.

A student might well not have the time to train as much as they would like, but that only means that instead of grading every four months, they might have to grade every eight months.

As an instructor with a family and a job, I find that my time is very limited and I tend to neglect the most important things in my life, but like many out there, that is the road I have chosen and I

have come to realize that I have to arrange my time carefully, because there is one thing in life you can't get back and that is time.

If you haven't got time to do something that you want to do, then make the time.

Finance

Like all sports, hobbies, and activities that people involve themselves in, there is always the question of, what is it going to cost me? I keep my training fees down as much as possible because of the expense that a student has to pay in order to get started in this art of ours, and because I feel that I'm there to teach what I have learnt, not to make money. I think finance is one of the biggest pressures that beginning students have. Let's have a look at how it happens. Firstly a person comes in to Do-jun to watch a class. That person likes what they see, so they go to the Instructor at the end of the class to find out more about this art and what they would have to do to join up.

I don't know what other Instructors say or do at this point, but what I do, is tell the person all I can about the art, trying not to bore them too much and give them as much written information as I can, to take home. I then ask them to come along to three or four sessions at no cost, to see if the art is what they have been looking for, before they decide to join.

With ten people you might get four that last the three or four sessions of free training.

Now is the crunch time. I tell these people the training fees, which is ok because as I said before I keep them low. Then I tell them that it will cost them x amount to join the foundation for their life membership, this is ok as this cost is not a lot by itself. Then I tell them they will need a uniform before they can grade and that grading will cost them x amount of dollars as well. Now depending on when they grade after joining, depends on how long they have got to pay, training fees joining fee, grading fees and a Dobok, which could add up to at least two hundred dollars.

For a beginner who is well to do, this is not a lot of money, but to the average person who is interested in TKD it could be a lot of pressure to come up with that sort of money within a three to six month period. We also have to look at the fact that TKD attracts more than one member of a family, so therefore the cost would be more pressure for the head of that family to bear than it would be for a single student. So far I have only talked about beginning students. Let's have a look at the costs for a student who has been practicing the art for a while. There is the cost of courses, camps, tournaments, doboks training fees, traveling, motels and many other costs before they have to pay out hundreds of dollars for a black belt grading. After black belt we start looking at the bigger costs, depending of course how far the student can afford to go, e.g. I have just spent five thousand dollars to go on a trip overseas. I went to support my seniors in their grading and I also needed to know for myself how TKD is practiced throughout the rest of the world. I think the money I spent on this trip was worth every cent, because what I gained out of that trip I could never sell.

Every dollar spent should be a stepping stone to further one's path in the road of life.

Physical Pressures

I have put physical pressures into two categories. Handicaps and age

There are others, but in my experience these are the three that I have had to deal with the most.

Handicaps.

Having a physical handicap is one of the greatest pressures any person will have to deal with, not only in Taekwon-do but also in life. Although the degree of the handicap will vary, we all will have to face a physical handicap at some time. For most of us it might only be a temporarily condition that will improve with time like a strained muscle or a broken arm. In my club I have four students who have permanent handicaps, which they have to persevere with each day of their lives.

One is a student who is hard of hearing. This student has the additional pressure while training to have to concentrate on what is being said more carefully in order to receive the instructions clearly. I notice that this student uses his eyes a lot more and tends to frown a lot in frustration when he can't quite hear what has been said. I also find myself repeating myself a lot more for his benefit, which is an added pressure for me as an instructor.

I have another student who has a clubfoot. This student is a young girl and she was born with this condition. Her parents were told that she might not ever walk and yet she is now attempting jump kicks. There are things that she will never be able to do like regain full balance after jumping or breaking boards with that foot. Her mother has told me that they make her practice Taekwon-do because of her foot and that because of this the muscles in her handicapped leg have developed to a degree that they never thought was possible.

The student that I take my hat off to is a student in my club with only one leg. This person only started Taekwon-do so as he could help his son in the art. Although he has just graded to yellow belt he seems to be coping well. He can't run so he does press-ups and sit-ups instead, he won't be able to do certain kicks so we will have to work together to develop hand techniques instead. I have had to ask for advice from my instructor's in how we can train this person and I'm looking forward to this added pressure.

Age.

Age is one of things that creep up on everybody. When you are young you find that you are supple, full of energy and training seems a lot easier to handle. People should always listen to their bodies, so, as they don't over do things while they are training.

Instructors have to be aware of their students age so as they can set their training plans out to suit all ages. Children's bodies don't fully develop until are in their late teens, so we have to be careful that we don't give them exercises that could hinder their growth and cause them to have physical disabilities later in life.

The older we get the harder it is to say fit and the longer it will take to recover from training. This seems like an on going pressure because to do this you need time. Another pressures that as you get older you don't seem to have as much of.

I feel that physically the perfect age for a Taekwon-do student is between 16 and 24 years of age.

The beauty about the art of Taekwon-do is that anyone can do it no matter what their age or their disabilities, if any.

If a limb is cut off a tree, Does that tree stop growing?

Psychological pressures

I have left this subject to last because any one of the other pressures, plus any pressure that I haven't mentioned, will determine the psychological state of mind that a person will be in when they turn up for training.

One of the most powerful aspects of any martial art is the mind, the mind controls the body and a person's state of mind can change from day to day depending on what pressures that person is under at any one time.

A person might have had a bad day at work or had a dispute with their spouse before coming to training or a child might have been told off by their teacher or looking forward to the holidays that might be coming up. All of these pressures plus many more will have an effect on a person's ability to train effectively.

If the mind is concentrating on the task at hand the person has five times more ability to learn. This almost never happens because the skill to concentrate on any one thing for any length of time is almost impossible. To test your own concentration spans, put a pencil in front of you and try to think of nothing else but that pencil for one minute. If any thing wanders into your mind within that minute you have failed.

The unique thing about the human brain is the we have the ability to reason and if the brain can't find the reason behind any given task then the body has a hard time trying to accomplish that task. This is why it is so important that Instructors explain to students what they are teaching, in a manner that they can understand. Also instructors must realize the concentration levels of their students e.g. children have a lower concentration level than adults and yellow belts have less knowledge than blue belts therefore a technique might have to be explained in a way so as the lowest level of concentration can understand it.

One of the aims of Taekwon-do is to get the mind and body working in harmony and to do this one needs to have a clear mind with the minimum amount of pressures as possible.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I would like to explain why I picked the pressures of Taekwon-do to write about.

Ever since I have been training in Taekwon-Do and in each grade I have achieved I have found different pressure's which I have had to overcome in order to keep training. These pressures are not always Taekwon-do related but they always affect the way I train. By understanding what has

and can affect me and my training, I can understand why my students don't turn up for training sometimes and why they sometimes don't perform as well as they would normally.

Not everybody has the same pressure and not every body has the same reasons for practicing Taekwon-do but everybody has the same requirements in Taekwon-do.

I feel it is important to understand each student and their pressure's, be it physical, financial or any pressure that could effect their training.

My hope is that other students and instructors read this and realize that they are not alone with all the outside pressures that we face each day and with a bit of luck we can help someone else along the road of Taekwon-Do by sharing the load that we sometimes have to carry in order to make it around the next bend.