

The Significance of Social Interactions among Club Members

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Over the past three years I have visited and trained with a number of clubs affiliated to our organisation, not just those in my own region (Central Districts) but also the clubs located in the Wellington and Auckland regions. I have met with numerous Tae Kwon-Do students and instructors, and have had the opportunity to observe the interactions and standards of those clubs. In this essay I would like to describe the thoughts and ideas that I have as a result of those observations. I will begin by outlining my experiences, then I will discuss my own ideas, and lastly I will briefly describe a number of ways that the objective can be achieved.

My general impression was that the standard of the members of our organisation varies from one club to another; by this I mean the standards of discipline, courtesy, attitude, and physical abilities of the members. In most clubs, the standard of instructing appears to be relatively in line with one another , although some instructors do have more interesting routines than others. The major trends that do stand out as a first impression whenever I visited a club for the first time is the atmosphere of the dojang, some being of a friendlier atmosphere than others. In these clubs I was approached and welcomed by the members and was introduced around the club on a personal level. The members of these clubs were usually numerous, very keen and motivated, and in general have a high standard. Members seemed to communicate with each other with good humour while still maintaining a good level of etiquette, and they all seemed to be very in-touch with one another.

The instructors and senior members had a very supportive attitude and were constantly being approached by the junior members. During the training session the members seemed to be training very hard and maintained an excellent standard of discipline where the correct dojang courtesies were observed. Further on I would learn that the club had a number of activities that were arranged periodically, be it a meeting at the pub down the road after training, a Bar-B-Q at somebody's place or the organisation of week-end camps. After the session concluded there was no hurry to leave and most members would usually stay on for another 15 or 30 minutes, either to continue with some personal training or conversing with one another. Overall, there was a great sense of belonging and pride.

In another club I would walk into the doJang and the atmosphere would be that of "doom and gloom"; the members were very quiet and did not seem to be communicating with one another. The numbers were usually very small with a low number of senior grades. The instructors were aloof and stern with their members. Discipline was usually very good and members did train very hard, rules and regulations of conduct were observed strictly. At the conclusion of the session, members usually left straight away. No after training social interaction between the members seemed to exist except for the usual greeting and parting courtesies.

The above mentioned observations have been responsible in helping me come to the belief that it is important for the instructor to get to know each individual member at a personal level outside the dojang rather than maintaining a reserved attitude. It is also important that the instructor

encourages and cultivates a good relationship between the members of his or her club. I also feel that it is advantageous to conduct a more relaxed training atmosphere rather than a military style training session. I believe that by doing all of the above it is possible to instill a feeling of belonging and pride within each member which will in turn be a great motivating factor to encourage them to train to their fullest potential and enjoy the art to the fullest.

A number of instructors would argue the point that "familiarity breeds contempt" and therefore would distance themselves from the students in order to ensure respectful attitudes and create a solemn training atmosphere. While the above argument have some substance, it is not necessarily true. The instructor should be able to interact with the student while not losing objectivity. When a person reaches the point of becoming an instructor, the person should be mature enough to be objective and secure enough to maintain authority during class. When Tae Kwon-Do is taught properly, the etiquette, courtesy and discipline should spontaneously come from within the students themselves. Therefore it should not be necessary for an instructor to be distanced from the students or engage in an overly strict, military style training in order to gain the students' respect.

A number of master instructors, such as Master Yun and General Choi recommend that instructors encourage social activities outside the Dojang in order to promote individual motivation, eliminate any destructive competition, and create a feeling of security and pride which in turn would be the basis for building a strong organisation.

Instructors who wonders why the number of members of their club are low even though they feel that they provide good instruction, a good venue, sufficient equipment and reasonable fees, should re-examine the situation in light of the above discussion. It is possible that the students feel that the instructor is too aloof or that the club does not have a welcoming feel for beginners.

There are numerous activities that can be carried out to ensure that members interact inside and outside the dojang. Partner work during training is a good way for members to introduce themselves to one another. By exchanging partners ever so often, members are forced to interact with the rest of the club; juniors and seniors, young and old, males and females.

Playing games for warm ups or warm downs adds some fun to what would usually have been a serious and hard session, and allows members to interact at a less formal level in the dojang.

Organising combined training sessions or workshops with neighbouring clubs allows members of one club to meet members from other clubs.

Activities that can be arranged outside the dojang are numerous and are open to the instructors' imagination. For example, organising outdoor trainings either in a park or on a beach, followed by a Bar-B-Q afterwards. This could be used as an opportunity to include parents and families of the members, keeping in mind that family support is a great factor in determining whether a student continues his or her training. A very good idea that I also took part in was the Tae Kwon-Do war games that are arranged annually in the Auckland region. Members from a number of clubs were invited to participate in the game that was conducted in a small reserve. Individual members' families were invited as spectators. After the game the plan was to have a Bar-B-Q at the park

grounds, but unfortunately it rained during the actual event, and the Bar-B-Q was then transferred to an instructor's house.

The organisation of Beach Trainings and Week-End Camps such as those conducted by all the three regions (for example, Motutapu Camps in Auckland and Foxton Camps in Central Districts) are an excellent chance to enable members of one club to meet members from other clubs in their region for a reasonable length of time, therefore even the most reserved of members will have to interact with others at some time through the camp.

For big events such as when there are some members going for Black Belt, instructors may like to organise a special Black Belt training session, where the instructor concentrates solely on those members who are preparing themselves for the big day. In this way, not only do the students receive specialised attention which can only improve their standard, but more than anything the students will feel that the instructor is supporting them through an important step in their study of the art. To know that one is not going it alone means a great deal to the dedicated student. I am sure that the interest shown and the personal time taken out by the instructor will be greatly appreciated by the student.

To conclude this essay I would like to summarise the main points that were discussed above. I have noticed a number of different styles of instructing, some I feel are more advantageous than others, this has been a fundamental force in forming my own ideas on how to conduct my own classes and it has also helped me to believe that it is vital to have good relationships amongst members of a club because it promotes a feeling of belonging and pride. This encourages the student to train to his or her fullest potential, in addition to providing the basis of a strong organisation of people. This type of relationships may be developed by using a variety of activities both inside and outside the dojang.

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