

What makes a good Instructor?

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Foreword:

I have to start by saying that this is not a work of research. I have not analysed what is good and bad in all instructors. I am not planning to teach anyone how to be a truly good instructor. For that there are instructors' courses, and other places you can go to learn.

Instead this is a work of opinion, I am writing it to express my views, on what I have seen in my last 10 years and a bit besides in Taekwon-Do.

As part of writing this I am aware that there are bound to be those that disagree with me. There will be those instructors out there who are particularly good at what they do who don't come close to fitting the descriptions within these pages. This is fine by me – after all, I have never trained under far too many of the instructors available within ITFNZ and I do lament at times the many experiences I am sure to have missed.

Treat this instead, as a learning journey – a path to clarification within my mind about what I feel is the best qualities of the instructors I have trained under. My invitation to you, the reader is to walk this path with me. You are free to agree with me where you see fit, or to offer your opinion where you feel appropriate. More so I would welcome this interaction, as I believe it is another stepping stone on all of our paths to becoming more complete instructors in Taekwon-Do.

This is definitely the short version, I have no doubt that it could be expanded to fill a thesis, or as a supplement to an Instructors Course. Please remember at all times as you read this, that it is just my observations, on how things seem to be.

Search For Somewhere To Start

Upon conceiving of this topic for my essay, I began to ask myself “Where do I start?”

I did try to start by defining what I meant by the term ‘good instructor’ but I soon found that the definition of ‘good instructor’ was as wide and varied as the instructors themselves.

It was simply impossible for me not to recognise that where one instructor has strengths, another might have weakness, or even that which I view as weakness, another might see as strength. While recognising this point I can honestly say that there has been no instructor in my Taekwon-Do career who was completely unable to offer me something that I could take away. It is just that there were some I could learn more from than others.

The first step of this journey has flowed from my recognition of the skills of each individual instructor. I began to wonder if I could define from each, precise things that could embody why I

considered each a 'good instructor', things that could be emulated to improve my ability to cope should I find myself in the position of 'instructor' for a club.

The Start

I have been searching for a place to start my journey. It has not been easy to find.

Plans flicker through my head of returning to my starting point and travelling from there, or beginning where I am and working my way back to the start, but I find while reflecting on my travels in Taekwon-Do that I have not been walking such a leisurely and linear path, and so tracing my travels from the beginning to where I am now just does not work.

Instead I take my beginning from now, and rather than travelling backward, I cast my thoughts across the years of my training and pluck from them the little things that my friends and teachers over the years have done that I liked.

These things I have then looked at in a bit more detail, to decide why it is that I like them, and whether or not they are part and parcel of what I think makes a good instructor.

The List

This list is in no particular order, nor is it particularly verbose at this point. Rather it is a brief collection of my thoughts and feelings on what makes a good instructor.

Following the brief listing is the expansion on each topic, where I have laid out, as best I can what I mean by each. I am sure that there is more that could be added to this list by others. I dare to say that I'll probably be able to add to it myself, but for now it is as complete as I can make it.

Involvement

Inspiration

Support

Respect

Honesty

Care

Patience

Involvement

This is by far the largest single topic; it encompasses much of the topics that follow it. I guess, to be truly be a good instructor, the art is first in becoming involved, and then realising what you bring to the club with you.

The involvement of an instructor in a Taekwon-Do club is essential because without the instructor there often is no club.

In addition to this but from what little I've seen, it is fairly common for an instructor to pour much of their time into a club, above and beyond the times per week that their club trains. However that's not what I am referring to in particular.

When I refer to the involvement of an instructor in the club I am looking only at arrangements when the club is together and training. (This includes any training above and beyond club nights where at least a portion of the club is present). I need to do this in order to separate club involvement from the instructors' life involvement in Taekwon-Do. The former is what this essay is about, the latter is personal to each student of Taekwon-Do, and while it might have bearing on my essay, it is a choice each of us must make on our own.

I feel that the very act of an instructor being involved in a clubs training makes a big difference in the perception of them as a good instructor. It is also a topic that encompasses or parallels many of the other items that I listed on the previous page.

When I say a good instructor gets involved in the running of their club I do not mean that he or she must be in front of the class the whole time. It could be that being in front of the class is not where a particular instructor has great strength.

When the instructor of a club does get in front of their class, and can be seen to demonstrate the techniques that they are asking their students to do, not only can those students see what it is they are supposed to be doing, but they can see that their instructor knows what he/she is talking about.

It is not always enough to assume that your students believe in your ability as an instructor. There will always be someone who would like to see that you can do at least some of what you're talking about when you are instructing, visual stimuli is also one of the largest ways many people learn.

This said, it's not necessary for the instructor to do every technique alongside their class; instead the instructor should demonstrate some of the techniques, some of the time. It is possible to use other students to demonstrate technique, particularly if they are gifted in something, but it always comes back to the instructor because everyone is interested to see what he/she can do.

Inspiration

This is tied intimately with the topic of involvement, realise it or not.

An instructor that is strong in the art of inspiration may or may not demonstrate anything themselves. Instead this sort of instructor has the gift of inspiring students to set their own limits, to challenge themselves, and always try for something more than what they are currently doing.

Inspirational instructors are those who can fire their students up to the point where they'll try a technique themselves, simply because they've heard about it, or seen it done elsewhere. They'll encourage their students to achieve new heights in their excellence in some things or maybe in all things, simply by being there, an example in their own right.

I don't know if this is something that can be emulated, I believe it may be a personal quality, rather than a skill, but I also believe by emulating the attitude and actions of an instructor that inspires you to excel, then you might possibly gain from them some of that quality that inspires yourself. I don't even believe that it is something your instructor will consciously teach. I just believe that it's something you can gain, unless you're lucky enough to have it already.

Support

A good instructor will support his or her students. By this I mean to encourage them when they are doing well, and to assist them when things are going wrong. This can be as simple as seeing where an extra word of encouragement, or some tuition in a particular technique will be appreciated, and applying it.

A supportive instructor will often see where a student needs that little bit extra from them, and give it because they can. It often does not need to be much. It truly is the little things that count. The nice thing about being a supportive instructor is that it's so easy once you begin truly paying attention to your students many instructors do it without even realising it.

Respect

This works both ways, and in my mind a good instructor is the one who does not demand respect from his or her students. A good instructor is one who gives due respect to students when they have earned it, and one who by their actions earns their student's respect in turn.

Honesty

As a student I always appreciated honesty in my instructors, I know I still appreciate receiving an honest opinion now.

Naturally this needs to be tempered by the instructors' words – harsh honesty intended to hurt the recipient does no one any good, least of all the student who receives it.

If a student has done well, they often deserve to hear it. If a student is doing badly they often need to hear it. Fulfilling these roles is part of the honesty of being an instructor. Fulfilling them without hurting feelings on occasion is going to be nearly impossible, but fulfilling them is a job that needs to be done, and often it is going to be appreciated.

Care

There is only so much that can be said for an instructor that cares about his or her students.

The act of caring for someone is a simple human action, and so it is something that we can all largely recognise. The reverse of this is also true.

The students who receive caring from their instructor are those who are likely to flourish, invite others to share in what they experience and prosper. This care is a facet of support, which can

be used to temper honesty, and creates a wonderful environment for students to grow in Taekwon-Do. This is why I feel it is important.

Patience

Instructors need patience when they teach Taekwon-Do. It is more common to encounter a student who needs it than one who does not, and having patience will ensure that no student feels more is required of them than they are capable of giving. This is a key element, particularly with beginning students, but also with senior students who are having trouble with a new technique.

Fortunately patience can be learnt because it is vital to getting involved and key in my mind to being a good instructor.

Concluding Statement

I wrap up this essay now, knowing that I could think of more to write. But knowing also that I have the basic ideas written down.

I expect anyone who reads this will be able to add things to the list of what makes a good instructor, all they have to do is find something they like about their own instructor that's not on the small list I have above.

The act of doing the looking helps each of us to improve ourselves when it's time for us to instruct, because there will be a memory there we can try to follow or improve on.

That is where I'll leave this essay, the next steps, those of following the examples of those whom I considered to be good instructors is something that each of us has to do on our own, but I'm sure we can all be certain that there is someone else walking that path beside us.