

合気手琉空手会

Aiki Te Ryu Karate Kai Honbu Dojo – Desk Reference of Shihan Franz

Topic: Earning your respect in Karate Do

In the United States today martial arts lessons are becoming more and more profitable but at what cost one must as one's self. In the past 15 years that I have been teaching the arts I have personally witnessed many a black belt, both coming to my dojo as well as a tournaments, who have no evident or qualified level of competence in their skills to wear such a rank. It is very hard for me to operate a profitable dojo as a traditionalist. One reason is the requirement, as a master, to be absolved from material possessions. The other reason is because there is a dojo on every corner, people teaching in their garages and almost everywhere you look someone claims to have some skill.

I can still remember how hard it was to find a dojo when I first wanted to train in the martial arts. Most of the bigger towns had them but there were none in the smaller towns. Even then you did not become a student by simply being able to pay for classes but rather had to be asked many questions by the sensei and based on your answers you were either sent away or accepted. There was a strong sense of integrity and seriousness when you first walked into a dojo. The Sensei was a commander and teacher not your buddy or a businessman first. They were there to teach you the historical arts and you had to learn great appreciation for them, their history and honor your Sensei, the Ryu and the Dojo or you would not be training there anymore. Today that sense of great worth has been replaced by what has come to be known as a McDojo.

McDojo is a term that relates martial arts schools with being like McDonalds. It may look and taste like a hamburger but in reality is not 100% pure beef. The general public is uneducated on what to look for in a martial arts school and Sensei. Everywhere you look, on the internet, in marketing materials and in the media you see each school's perception on what a parent should look for in choosing a school. No one ever stops to state the most important aspects one should consider...the students MUST earn everything at a good dojo. Perhaps this is because they want to tout their accomplishments or they want to hit you up with a high pressure sales tactic. Maybe it because they want to lock you into a five year "Masters" training agreement. No matter what their reasons for being unable to state the most important aspects of why one should go to a good school one thing remains...they want your money and will sacrifice quality for dollar signs. This has created a loss of integrity in what the martial arts once were known for and there is no sign of it fading anytime soon.

As a Sensei it will be hard for you to ever have to fail, hold back or ride a student...but you must learn to stand on your integrity or you will be laughed at. Sure the martial arts

are not an overnight miracle. You will not have the average student throwing perfect kicks in a year or so. You will not have students who can put their spirit into what they are doing in a few months. This simple does not happen and you need to come to the realization that earning anything in martial arts is a long, time consuming and very hard process. Once you understand this you will begin to have parents, and students' thanking you for being tough on them.

At the Honbu Dojo we are often criticized for riding the technical training of our students with too much practice. We throw triple amounts of Kihon Waza, spend hours on stance training and repeat Kata until it hurts...and then we do it all over again. Our focus is on perfection of technique which creates a deeper understanding in one's training. I personally have been accused of expecting too much from my students during a test, pushing them too hard and sometimes even singling them out. The funny part about this is that they are the students who always "think" they know better than their Sensei, who is the person that once stood right there...just as they do now. Once a student, and sometimes the parent, can get "over themselves" then you can teach them and they will get much better and in a shorter amount of time, but if you "sell out" to avoid losing a student then your entire dojo, way of teaching and level of respect will die out as well. The question always comes into mind about what level is acceptable when you award a student a new belt.

It is important that you realize that each student is different, unique and you must judge them accordingly but it is up to you make them the best they can be. They will never be thankful if you let them skate by. I have promoted students to their next belt even though their Kata was not exactly what I wanted, but that is because they did show proper improvement since their last belt. Up until a student reaches brown belt level everything they do is about memorization, repetition and development of technique. From brown belt to black belt it is about perfecting their skills and techniques. This is why most students can make it to brown belt in about two years but it ends up taking about another two years to make it to Shodan...and is one the main reasons people quit at this level.

Perhaps the hardest part for us to understand is why a student leaves, goes to a different school and shows up six months later with a black belt? I can answer that one easily...it wasn't that the new school was better, or the instruction was better but rather you laid the foundation and they were more skilled when they left your Dojo than the black belts at the other school. Not to mention they probably didn't have to work hard to get it and maybe don't even deserve it. I have students of mine offered black belts if they switch schools. I find this one of the most embarrassing a true Sensei could ever do. I have never offered rank, nor would I ever just to "get" a good student from another dojo. That is plain stupid but many times it has happened and I have lost a few of my better technical students to those Sensei...but the they all returned eventually and had to start where they left off.

It is important that a Sensei trains the dojo, but teaches the individual. Set clear goals for the students as a group and explain clear expectations to the individual students. You

must teach all as one, but remember the one is just as important as all are. Never give a belt to a student who DOES NOT deserve it...even at the risk of them quitting. It is better to lose a quitter than to train one. One of the most important things for you to remember is that if you, yourself would not go through it...or did not go through it then how can you ask that of your students? My training was ten times tougher than what I put my students through...but I came up in a different era. Things changed and one of the primary foundations of a true martial artist is their ability to adapt in order to create victory. The Aiki Te Ryu Karate Kai takes great pride in their black belts, not just because they can technique well but also because they are good Karateka. They honor their dojo, care for the future of their art and respect their forefathers (Sensei). I would never dishonor them by selling out just to keep a student or make a dollar...THAT IS NOT THE KARATE WAY.