



WADO INTERNATIONAL KARATE-DO FEDERATION

DOJO CONNECTION

Like Minded People With A Common Goal

January 2011

Happy New Year

“Akemashite medetou gozaimasu.”

I look forward to our continued relationship over this year.

“Kotoshi mo yoroshiku onegaishimasu.”

How Good Is Good Enough?

The subject of Dan Grading is something I would like to touch on briefly since there seems to be a misunderstanding on the part of some students on just exactly what it is. This is prompted by a conversation with a karate friend about how so many people seem to make Shodan (1st degree Black Belt) and then quit six months to a year later.

We expect this to happen with new students in a dojo because they cannot be expected to have a complete understanding of the training process and certain priorities within it when they first decide to learn karate. But what about these people who have trained for four years or longer, get somewhere, and then just walk away?

I have heard it said that Samuel Clemens (Mark Twain) was fascinated by the Mississippi River until he received his license to pilot a riverboat. Within two years, for whatever reason, he left the river. That sounds a lot like what seems to happen to so many new Shodans. I have never quite understood how someone could spend five years or longer working diligently to achieve a certain level and then just walk away within six months to a year. Maybe they just reached a level that they thought was good enough. More likely in my mind they never understood what they were reaching for in the first place. A “Dan” is simply a grade given to people who is suppose to have obtained a certain level of skill in the martial art that person practices (karate, judo, akido, etc.). Different organizations have different levels of grading but generally they run from a Shodan (1st Dan) to Jewdan

(10th dan). A Shodan for instance is suppose to be a person who has taken what is really considered to be the first step along the path of skill mastery and has been graded at a black belt level. It DOES NOT mean that one has achieved “master” status just because they got their black belt. In fact to a long term, serious martial artist, the 1st Dan level is considered to be more like an advanced beginner than a master.

Many people claim “master” status but few really are. Since there is no real licensing agency in this country a person can, and they frequently do, award themselves whatever grade they want or think they deserve. You can claim to be whatever Dan grade you want. Any print shop in the country can print you an impressive looking certificate and you can buy a black belt from any number of Martial Arts supply companies. With this in mind having in your possession a certificate and a black belt in itself does not make anyone a master of anything, a quality martial artist, nor a quality person for that matter. The only thing that really counts for serious martial artists is what you have done and what you continue to do on the dojo floor where anyone can see you exposed for what you are or are not. Achieving a Black Belt does not mean you have arrived by a long shot. A Dan grade is not something that you get to show off to other people. It doesn’t change who you are or what you are. It constantly begs one to ask of themselves, “How good is good enough?”

Culture

Throughout my educational career I did a lot of work with low achieving schools. Research on schools shows that while both high achieving schools and low achieving schools do many of the same things the low achieving schools do not have a culture, a focus, and norms that nurtures and pushes student achievement. The difference seems to lie in part not in what is being

taught but in how the teaching is approached. I think there is a direct correlation to running a successful dojo or karate organization as well.

I was sitting in the stands at a High School wrestling match several years ago when I heard one of the wrestlers say, "I'm going to lose tonight because there is no way I can beat that guy." Of course he was right because it is almost impossible to do something you don't believe you can do. You become what you think you are.

My experience with good teachers was that they think like winners. They act in the best interests of their students and not their own best self-interest. Winners in any arena believe they can win, and then they work like crazy to make it happen. Master teachers believe in their students and in their teaching ability. They do whatever it takes. Master teachers don't just talk the talk, they model the way.

If the culture in our dojo and Federation says that we can't make a difference then we won't. We can only succeed when we believe it is possible. If we do not believe in the quality of the karate we practice and the benefits of staying together as a group then it won't make any difference what we say or do.

"If everyone is moving forward together then success takes care of itself."

Henry Ford

The Business of Martial Arts

I received a magazine in the mail that is devoted exclusively to the business of the Martial Arts. It talks a lot about new-style profits and how to market your self and your school. I have several problems with this type of commercial karate. First, I think it cheapens the original idea of karate. When the public is exposed to so many karate schools they become disillusioned. The appeal and value of authentic training is diminished when it is turned into something for sale. Most commercial karate schools rarely respect how karate works. The subtleties of real training are sacrificed for the one-dimensional need to make money.

Now I do know a few schools where they have managed to combine good training with good business practices. My beef is not with those places. There is nothing wrong with turning a profit in itself. The

difference is whether the school is open to teach karate or so that someone can run a commercial empire.

Beyond all of the commercial issues lies a deeper concern: the corruption of integrity. When a karate sensei is honestly trying to teach karate he or she has a responsibility to the art and must think beyond satisfying the public's every whim and desire. Those who think they can be taken seriously as Martial Artists while "selling" their art to the public are deluding themselves.

Fix It

I was training with Suzuki Sensei in my dojo a few years back and was not doing a particular kata very well. After being corrected several times I said to Sensei, "Sorry."

Sensei just looked at me with that look he sometimes gives you and said to me, "Don't be sorry. Fix it!" Then he made me do it many more times by repeating his favorite English word, "AGAIN!" I don't know if I ever got it right but I did improve...some...I think.

An unsuccessful performer should not make excuses. Instead he or she should try and determine why he or she was unsuccessful, and then try to correct the performance and do it correctly the next time. If you have a strong enough desire to achieve a certain level of skill you will learn how to persevere until you derive sufficient success. Attitudes toward activity and performance in the practice of physical skills have strong influences on how your practice will affect the realization of your physical potentials and the development of your skills.

As you approach higher levels of skill you have to practice even more diligently to obtain further improvement. If you understand that improvement in skill becomes increasingly more difficult the better you get, you can keep from becoming discouraged at relatively slow progress.

***"Be not afraid of growing slowly;
be afraid only of standing still."***

Chinese proverb