

Tae Kwon Do - Teaching Philosophy

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I first began training in martial arts in 1985. I had thought that it would be great to be a martial artist for many years, but had not sought out the opportunity prior to then. At that time, I was stationed at Chanute Air Force Base in Illinois, after completing a 3-year residency in Family Medicine at Scott Air Force Base. I trained for 3 years in Shudokan karate. I completed my 7 year tour of duty in the United States Air Force in 1988 and returned to my home town of Bethany, Missouri to practice medicine. At that time, I began Tae Kwon Do classes which were taught by Mr. Dennis Meagers.

When I began training, I expected to learn how to punch and kick and I expected to learn self-defense. However, I had no idea of the vast knowledge to be gained from martial arts training. I did not understand the true meanings of the tenets of Tae Kwon Do, nor did I understand that Tae Kwon Do becomes a way of life and impacts everything that I do. The important parts of Tae Kwon Do were the things that I was not aware of when I began training and actually takes many years to understand. These are the things that shape my philosophy and approach to teaching Tae Kwon Do.

There are several things that I feel are important for me personally in order to be a good instructor. First of all, I think it is important for me to be a good martial artist. I cannot be a good role model for my students without training hard myself.

General good physical fitness is essential for good martial arts training. If a person is not fit they are less able to concentrate on technique and Tae Kwon Do training because of shortness of breath, weakness, and the "need to survive". While a person can significantly improve their fitness in class, as an instructor I find it necessary to train extensively in addition to class time as it is not possible to give the students what they need and also train with intensity.

Regular forms practice is necessary to maintain consistency in teaching. If one is not practicing all forms on a regular basis it is easy to allow mistakes and changes to creep in, which makes it difficult to teach students well.

Other physical aspects of training are important as well such as flexibility, speed, strength and stamina. Despite feeling that I need to continue to train, that is not my primary objective as an instructor. When I teach it is important that I do useful techniques that students feel they can achieve. Flashy, hard to learn techniques may be good for an instructor's ego but they do not help students learn Tae Kwon Do. Students need to gradually learn and improve, always being challenged but not being discouraged. An egotistical instructor can easily mislead a student to believe that he is not capable of becoming good enough to earn a black belt.

I believe that each student has specific needs. A new student begins taking classes for a variety of reasons but will often continue to train for entirely different reasons as they discover what Tae Kwon Do really has to offer. It is sometimes difficult for the instructor to know what motivates a student but that knowledge will improve the training

experience for the student. It is important for the instructor to see a student's potential and build on their strengths in order to encourage them as the instructor gradually works on improving the students' weaknesses. Eventually, as the student matures in Tae Kwon Do he will become self-motivated and will require less support from the instructor. At that point the instructor's priorities change and more time is spent challenging the student, providing information and feedback, and providing leadership.

We have had many students in class who have special needs. We have had students with attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder, mental retardation, cerebral palsy, deafness, and various physical limitations. These students are still able to train and derive tremendous benefit from Tae Kwon Do. The discipline is helpful and an especially great benefit for many of these students is developing friendships outside their usual environment. Sometimes teaching students with special needs is quite challenging and requires much more one-on-one attention. However, the rewards are tremendous.

I find teaching Tae Kwon Do a great experience. Regardless of how busy the rest of my life becomes, Tae Kwon Do remains a priority. I feel that martial arts training touches many lives, not only the lives of the student but also their families, co-workers and friends. The lessons learned by making Tae Kwon Do a "way of life" influences all those people that we encounter in our daily lives because it affects our interactions with them. If we have internalized the tenets of Tae Kwon Do, then we will be honest (integrity), be kind (courtesy), and be upbeat and successful (indomitable spirit, perseverance).

In summary, teaching Tae Kwon Do is about what we can do for our students, leading them to become good martial artists who make Tae Kwon Do a way of life and become good instructors themselves.