

Expert Tips & Tactics

Business Myopia

Although this article talks specifically about martial arts, read it anyway, I think that there's a larger message here.

When we market our martial arts to our potential clients we can sometimes be accused of having "Black Belt Eyes." I got the term from a book by John Graden's book. Although I am sure that we can agree that myopic marketing is the inability to see through the eyes of the client, there is more to having "Black Belt Eyes" than this form of blindness.

One of the things that infects almost all instructors, at least to some degree, is a sense that their martial art is the greatest. We pay tribute to the other arts, but in the sanctuary of our own schools, and in the quiet corners of our hearts, ours is the one true way.

Go on, be honest, you've thought it...at least once. It is only natural; after all we all have preferences and likes. There are some styles of martial art that appeal to us more than others and, if you wish to be successful as an entrepreneur you have to be willing to do two things: Get really good at what you do and market the quality of your product. It's a tad difficult to evangelize your art if you don't believe in the skills that you are learning. If we, as instructors, do not believe in the arts that we teach; how are we going to attract and retain students? So let's take it for granted that whatever style you/we/I teach, it is the greatest martial art ever. I can say this in an unabashed sort of way because after nearly forty years of training, I definitely have my preferences.

Occasionally though, it does us well to remember that like all of the world's "greatest martial arts", the ones we study are just part of the meal from which we all eat...Judo is a part of the meal...so is Sambo, or Kung Fu, or Hapkido or any other art you can name. One of the most

insidious traps of the martial arts is to become malnourished by eating our favorite food...all the time. Different foods contain different nutrients and we all know that nutrient deficiencies can lead to all manner of dis-ease. Any time we take a snack in another part of the meal we are gaining some nutrients we might not otherwise get. One of the dis-eases that we can get from nutrient deficiency is martial myopia, which can lead to technical blindness, attitudinal sclerosis and system rigidity.

So from the perspective of being an instructor and being a business owner, it seems to me that one of the most important things to do is to get some more nutrients into the system. It is true for all of us...we could all do to get out more and see other schools, even places where we might not agree with the philosophy of training or the approach to teaching...everyone has something to teach us. I feel it in my own training when I stagnate...I need to see other people, and not necessarily people who out-rank me either. I can learn as much from a lower ranking instructor as I can from someone higher...it's not about rank, or style, or politics, or philosophy...it's simply about exposure and nutrition.

If you are a teacher, you must keep learning. The more learning opportunities to which you can expose yourself, the better will be your ability to meet the needs of your students, regardless of your specialty.

Let me finish with something else that you already know: Every student you touch for even a moment, goes away changed by the experience. We want those changes to be for the better. This is one of the defining characteristics of being a martial arts instructor: We care about our people. But we cannot control whether our students stay or go; we can only control our own behavior. We can control what we do moment by moment on the deck in every class we teach and every interaction with every student.

We can control what we learn and what insights we have to pass on. We can control whether or not we are willing to become the student and open our eyes to ideas that are normally outside of our training world. We can control whether or not we are willing to eat our vegetables.

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