

## Expert Tips & Tactics

### Traditions

All cultures have rituals, rites of passage and traditions. Those who understand the rituals belong to the group; those who do not are outside of it. Have you ever wondered how much this affects how we run our businesses? Again, this article is written from my cultural perspective of being a martial arts business owner, but look at your own business....what is your culture?

Look at it from the perspective of a potential client. Clients come to our businesses and see an unfamiliar world; they often hear an unfamiliar language and a specific set of terms that have meanings that are hidden to the uninitiated. We have traditions; potential clients are not yet part of those traditions. It doesn't matter what business you run, people who have never been there before do not know your culture or your language...think about it. If you have never done any car mechanics before, try going to an auto store and asking for a part that you think you might need. EVERY business has its own language and culture.

So there is a bridge to build here between the potential clients and their operational knowledge base and the business and its societal traditions. The bridge is called B-E-N-E-F-I-T-S. Our clients come to us with needs and unfulfilled frustrations, it is our job as business owners to discover those needs and resolve the frustrations. We explain the benefits of becoming a member of our society. Our clients are thrilled with the possibilities so they invest in our business. Right?

Once they are a client, they learn the secret codes and traditions and become part of the culture. At the next level, we then expect those very same clients to go out and evangelize for us (get referrals). If they have become believers, they will do exactly that, simply because they do now see the benefits of what we have to offer.

So why is it that we create specific sub-cultures that set us apart from our competitors? I was reading a martial arts trade magazine recently and one of the articles was talking about traditions that have gone away like kata, meditation, sparring and uniforms. When my program manager

read the article she asked me what the writer meant because we do all those things in our business....they are part of our *tradition*.

We talked about how different schools have their own way of doing things and how my background has strongly colored the way in which I built the vision of my dojo (martial arts school).

And there, ladies and gentlemen is your first clue: It is *my* vision. No-one else has *my* vision. My vision is built from my experiences of life and of the martial arts and my ideas; it is a unique mosaic. As a result of being unique, the vision needs interpreters who can explain it to other people who might then see something useful within it. This, of course, is the moment at which we enter the world of marketing. It is also the moment that we enter the world of the sub-culture. My school has a set of traditions that are familiar to some and unfamiliar to others. People who become my clients are those who see value in what we do and who derive benefit from being with us.

The first implication is therefore that I cannot be all things to all people. The second implication is that I will only ever reach those people who are looking for what we offer.

So what am I getting at? It's really not about the traditions, we can make them attractive or we can use them to keep people away. The real message here is using what is unique about your vision to attract people to you and to keep them coming back class after class, year after year. Traditions do one of two things they either include people, or they exclude people. It is for you to decide how you wish to use your traditions. In the final analysis it is not whether you do 'traditional' martial arts or some modern eclectic derivative, what matters is whether you offer something of value to the market place.

Do you?

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