



BLACK BELT LEADERSHIP



- By Justin Morris -



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Enjoy the Journey

It was 1998, I was 21 years old and I had just purchased the building that would be my first official dojo. The building was 57,000 dollars and at that time, that amount of money may as well have been a million dollars! The building was a long, narrow, historical property located in a dying downtown business district that probably had its last economic boom in the early 1900's. Prior to this purchase, I was teaching in an old abandoned school house in the rural town of Fox Lake, Wisconsin. I had approximately 10 students in the old school house and I wasn't planning on leaving it but the house sold and we had to move. On A historical note, I hosted one of the first MMA fights in the United States at that house. That event was even mentioned in a book written by Jiu Jitsu legend Royler Gracie. Many of the people that fought that day became successful martial artists including David Menne who won UFC 33 to become the first middleweight champion. Henry Matamoros who later became Wisconsin's first BJJ black belt fought that day and so did Eric "Red" Schafer who also went on to fight in the UFC.



"1991 with my Mom Roxanne Morris during our first belt promotion together"



"1994 as a white belt with Royce Gracie - this is the day I tested for the blue belt in Jiu Jitsu"

The 1990's brought an evolution of martial arts led by Royce Gracie and the Gracie family as they dominated every UFC and every challenge fight from 1992-1995. Although we only had a handful of students, our academy, Third Heaven Martial Arts, was at the forefront of this evolutionary process. When I wasn't busy re-defining martial arts in the United States, working on technique, traveling for JiuJitsu seminars and competitions, I was working full time doing maintenance at a department store called Shopko. Daily tasks at Shopko included cleaning bathrooms, changing light bulbs, emptying trash cans and sweeping floors. I come from a long line of maintenance workers. My Grandpa, my father and my uncles were all maintenance workers. These guys are my heroes - hard working guys who put food on the table and who never complained about the work. Despite my immense respect for them and their honest blue-collar work, I was to accomplish my own dreams of becoming a professional martial artist.





Training with
Royce Gracie and
my Wife in the
early 2000s

The purchase of my new building helped me to attract an additional 10 students or so. I was only getting by because of my full time job at Shopko. One morning I was called into the manager's office and was offered a significant promotion. They wanted me to be the regional maintenance manager. I would be in charge of several stores. The new position came with a significant pay raise and a matching 401K plan. I went home and considered my future and I never went back to Shopko. The decision to put all of my effort into my martial arts academy with no plan B was probably one of the most significant decisions I have ever made for my business. Everyone I worked with thought I was throwing my life away, one particular co-worker even said the 401K was a “guaranteed million dollars” when I retire. **Shopko permanently closed its doors in July of 2019. No one received



their 401Ks or retirement funds as promised. I started writing this book the week after I quit Shopko to become a full time martial artist. This book, originally titled “A Black Belts Guide to Leadership” re-surfaced in 2022 when I was searching a folder on an old computer. I had forgotten about this book but after reading it again I thought that it had some significance and that it was time I finished it.**

Now that I was able to put all of my focus on my martial arts school, within one year I had enrolled thousands of students, upgraded my location, started a world wide affiliate organization and made a million dollars. Oh wait I did actually accomplish those things, but it took me 25 years. Those first few years I was broke, homeless, had my utilities turned off 3 times and I quit the martial arts out of frustration almost every month for many years. Looking back, many of those challenging times were without a doubt the best days of my life. I miss that adventure and I wish I would have slowed down to enjoy the journey more. In the 1990's I remember a time when I traveled to Evansville, Indiana with professional Fighter Henry Matamoros for an MMA event. The trip was a total disaster yet it is one of the greatest memories I have from my personal journey to black belt. Driving from Wisconsin to Illinois should have taken about 3 hours. The plan was to meet up with Hook N Shoot champion Jason Stransberg in Illinois, stay with him for the night and then travel the rest of the way to Indiana in the morning together. This was before cell



phones and Google maps. I had a large print out of the directions (map quest) but we missed a turn and ended up in South Carolina. With no money for a hotel we slept in the car that night and never even made it to meet up with our friend in Illinois. The next day Henry had an exhibition fight with Mario Roberto, a young brown belt from Brazil. This was supposed to be a fun exhibition style match but the next day Henry was scheduled to fight a pro fight that would pay for our entire trip. During the exhibition match Henry was caught in a really tight heel hook that completely destroyed his knee. Not being able to compete in the pro fight the next day due to the injury meant no fight purse which left us broke, tired and hungry. I vaguely remember crashing a party at a run down hotel and stealing as much food as we could. The part of this trip that really stands out in my memory was that Henry had a stick shift but was unable to drive due to his injury. I had a crash course in driving a stick shift and the car sputtered and stalled out for the entire 6 hour drive back home. This disaster of a trip was one of the greatest memories I have in my martial arts journey. The best advice I would give someone in the martial arts today is slow down and enjoy the process.



Henry Matamoros faces Royler Gracie in a grappling super fight.

Martial Arts can be one of the most difficult and yet rewarding professions in the world! It is said that training in the martial arts is a lifelong journey. This is especially true for teachers. As an instructor in the martial arts, it is very important to continue your training. You must constantly improve yourself by training to be a better fighter, learning to be a better person, and practicing to be a better leader. Additionally your martial arts training will keep you strong and agile, and your students will appreciate your commitment to continued improvement.

Back in the 90's I spoke to mixed martial arts legend Frank Shamrock on the subject and he said, "The most important thing you can do as a martial artist is find a good teacher." So, what makes a good teacher? I have known many people who can fight but who cannot teach. After spending many years contemplating this question, I have come to the conclusion that a good teacher is someone with a sincere passion to help others achieve their goals.



Over the last two decades of teaching martial arts I have admittedly, had a few self centered goals. The worst example of this is when I first started my martial arts academy in 1997 I was training for a lot of Brazilian JiuJitsu and MMA competitions. Back in the late 90's and early 2000's I saw my students as my competition training partners. This way of thinking gave me a small group of very tough competitors but I had a hard time keeping my enrollment numbers up. As I got older and dealt with injuries I stopped competing. I am no longer the strong and flexible athlete I was 20 years ago. When I stopped putting the focus on myself and started teaching for

the sole benefit of my students, my students had a much more enjoyable experience and my enrollment skyrocketed.



I think it is important to find balance as a martial arts instructor. If you can retain your passion for the martial arts it will be easier to help others.

This is why I feel so strongly that even though you shouldn't start a martial arts school for the sole purpose of having teammates to train with, you still have to keep training and you have to train different styles with different people.

Always push yourself.

Make it a personal challenge to learn something new each day.



Choose Your Instructor

It is of the utmost importance to affiliate yourself with a good teacher. Pick a teacher who displays exceptional skills in the martial arts field, and exceptional people skills. As long as you can continue to learn valuable lessons from your instructor, stay loyal to him. Ask yourself if your instructor is the kind of person that you wish to be. A good instructor will not be afraid of a student who can surpass their own abilities or limit their growth due to ego. A great instructor will encourage excellence when they see the potential.





Develop a Mastermind Group

My friend and professional fighter, Henry Matamoros, once told me, “If you want to be a wolf, you have to run with the wolves.” If you want to succeed, surround yourself with successful people. Build a group of successful people that you can meet with or call regularly. This group could be made up of competitive martial artists, leaders from your martial arts school, other martial arts school owners, or even successful business owners. Within your group you can discuss business strategy, marketing, dealing with the public, or any other topic. I still stay in communication with many of my old instructors and I have made a lot of new friends in the martial arts industry and we always help each other to learn and grow as martial artists. My online academy at teamthirdheaven.com has also been a way to develop an even stronger mastermind group. Many students join our online academy to receive certification and expand their martial arts knowledge, but even more instructors have joined recently to work together for massive growth in our academies. Spreading the martial arts has been my lifelong passion and my hope is to reach a large world wide audience for martial arts instruction and preservation.



Working Through Excuses

Have you ever had a person walk into your school and say, “I want to sign up for classes, but I am just not in good enough shape”? As school instructors we think that sounds absurd! I hear that excuse a lot and I always wonder how people think they are going to get in better shape by NOT joining the martial arts program.

I have also had many people beg me for a discount on lessons because they have NO money, but they really want to get in shape and learn from our programs. It is very disheartening after giving a person a discount out of pity, I hear they throw away money every weekend at the bars. People will have lots of poor excuses for not bettering themselves, but if someone really wants to do it, they will always find a way.

Speaking of excuses, I started thinking about all of the excuses I have made over the years as a martial arts instructor. I don't have the time for private lessons, I don't want to do demonstrations, I don't have the money for new mats or equipment. The list goes on and on. Over twenty years ago I decided to stop making excuses. I decided that my struggling JiuJitsu academy was not going to be just a hobby but a real business.



Once I stopped making excuses, my school began to thrive! This taught me a very important lesson about excuses. There will never be a perfect time to do anything. I wanted to wait until my life was perfect before putting real effort into my dojo, but the hard truth is life will never be perfect. The time to rush toward your dreams and goals is right now.

Working Through Injuries

As a mixed martial arts and JiuJitsu practitioner myself, I know that injury is a very persistent problem that plagues our industry. Sometimes it doesn't matter how smooth you roll, how relaxed you are or how physically fit you are, injuries will happen. An instructor who takes time off for injuries can be a major stumbling block for the students. Small injuries such as minor sprains should not keep the instructor off of the mat. Brazilian JiuJitsu black belt Jacare Cavalcante the founder of Alliance JiuJitsu once told me, "If you break your arm don't stop training. Just work your guard until your arm is healed. If you are a kick boxer and your leg is hurt real bad, just work your punches but never ever stop training." If you need to take a couple of days off due to minor injuries then you may not be in the right line of work. Let's never forget we are fighters! Even if the doctor tells us that we cannot grapple or spar, we still need to be there to teach and coach our students.



I would like to share two amazing stories about people who have overcome tremendous physical setbacks. Both of these people have been an inspiration to my students and myself.

Travis Torres began his martial arts training with me in 1996. From the start he was dedicated to his training, and in a few years he achieved the rank of blue belt in Brazilian Jiu Jitsu. Travis was one of my top students when at the peak of his training, in 2001, he fell off of a very steep cliff while hiking. He suffered brain damage, shattered his collarbone and shoulder, and his ear was torn off. He was knocked unconscious for over an hour. The doctors stitched his ear back on, but he was in the hospital for several days. When he was released, he was still in really bad shape. A few times he called me, then couldn't remember who or why he called. The signs of brain damage lingered for several months, and we all wondered if he would ever be the same. The doctors told him that he probably would never do Jiu Jitsu again. Travis worked hard through physical therapy and then started lifting weights again. His brain fully recovered and one year after the accident, he was back on the mat. Now Travis is once again one of my toughest students, and became the first person to receive a black belt in my mixed martial arts program.

****If you recall, I wrote this book many years ago and just recently decided to finish it. Unfortunately Travis passed away a few years ago from an unrelated incident and he will forever be missed. Travis had stopped training but right before he passed we went out to lunch together and he was planning his return to the Dojo. Rest in peace brother I will see you again.****



Travis Torres my first MMA black belt.

In the late 90's I had the privilege to take a seminar taught by the first American black belt under Carlson Gracie, Aaron Lapointe. Aaron has been training in Jiu Jitsu for over 25 years. He is a great teacher, has an amazing guard, and extensive knowledge of Jiu Jitsu. Aaron is one of the toughest guys and nicest people I have ever rolled with, and he tapped me out several times. And he does it all with only

one arm! When Aaron was very young, he was in a devastating car accident that left his right arm completely paralyzed. It is certainly no handicap to him on the mat!

The next time you feel like making excuses as to why you can't train, or how hard it is to work out every day, remember Travis and Aaron. Let their stories inspire you!



Aaron Lapointe Pictured above with Carlson Gracie.

Aaron is still training and inspiring people.



Business Training

A positive attitude at all times and a continued desire for personal growth will help build a solid foundation for your martial arts program. When I asked Dan “The Beast” Severn to tell me why he has been so successful in his career he said, “I always have leadership and success books lying around my office.” To stand out from the crowd and seriously make an impact in the martial arts industry and in people’s lives, we have to train our minds as hard as we train our bodies. When I asked Mr. Severn what was the most powerful lesson he learned as a business owner he told me. “I will never trust anyone to run a martial arts academy for me if they do not have a vested interest in the gym.” What Dan was saying is that he gave someone a martial arts business but I guess it didn’t go very well. What I took from that is that if someone is willing to screw over the top MMA fighter in the world at the time, don’t think it can’t happen to you. This takes me back to why it is important to have friends in the industry that you can trust before making bold business decisions.

Most people that I meet in the martial arts world have a specific workout routine that they follow each week. Just as our muscles need to be worked out to grow and maintain strength, so do our minds. I would like to challenge you to develop a routine for your success in the same manner you do for your body. I believe that life

is too short and too precious to be wasted away by simply existing. We need to strive to continually be a better person.

Business Plan

In 1997 I was running my school as a hobby. I worked several odd jobs and could hardly make rent. After several years of struggling with the school, I decided to start running things like a professional business. For many people, including myself, success was simply a decision. I decided I was going to make it work and I did.

Too often business strategy is overlooked by martial arts school owners. Maybe it is because we get caught up in the excitement of starting our first dojo and forget to develop a plan that sets us apart from our competition. You wouldn't step into the ring cold and unprepared. So why is it that so many school owners miss the vital step of preparation in opening their first gym? Optimism and excitement too often blind new business owners and leave them without a game plan. There is no doubt that the untrained fighter would not fare well in the ring or the cage, in the same sense the untrained businessman will not survive in the world of martial arts business.

Develop a mission statement

The first step in creating a clear sense of direction for your martial arts school is to come up with a mission statement. Your mission statement will define what business you are in and answer several questions including: What basic beliefs, values, and principles does our school stand for? What is our product/service? What are the intrinsic values of our product/service? Why did I start this business?

Your mission statement should inspire you. When you read it, you should feel focused and ready to take on the world. It should be based on sound principles and values. Keeping the mission statement alive in your business, however, will be harder than writing it!

In a way, the mission statement is the heart of your business. As long as you keep it alive it will keep your business going and growing in the right direction. After you've written the final draft of your mission statement, post it prominently in your school. Encourage your employees \ instructors (and yourself) to make decisions based on the statement.

Define Your Perfect Student

I love all of my students and each one is very valuable in a unique way. In order for me to properly market my school I had to define who my PERFECT student was so that I could market specifically to them.

My perfect student is not a fighter or a competitor but I have fighters in my academy that are some of my favorite students, my perfect student isn't a young college kid that I only see in the summer but I look forward to seeing these kids every year, my perfect student isn't a 5 year old from a broken home but my love runs deep for many of these students. My perfect student is a husband and wife with two children, a boy and a girl between the ages of 7-10. The Mom is enrolled in Kickboxing and the Dad is enrolled in Jiu Jitsu, they won't pull their kids out of class until they become black belts. Their membership is paid on time every month and they have even offered to help pay for a student that has fallen on hard times. It is not uncommon to see the husband and wife helping out in kids' class.

This couple has a stable income from a job and they live close to the dojo. The couple are such strong leaders they could easily pull it off starting their own academy. As their martial arts journey moves closer to black belt they start another Third Heaven Martial Arts. This couple teaches together and helps to spread our

martial arts throughout the world. Your perfect student might not be anywhere near what mine is but when I post on social media or my website I always ask myself if that post will attract my perfect student.

Define your target market

It is a well known fact that no single product or service appeals to everyone. Just take a walk through your local department store. There are at least 20 different brands of shampoo, 15 different brands of deodorant, innumerable vitamins, herbs and dietary supplements.

We would like everyone in our town to join our dojo, but we know that won't happen. The martial arts do not appeal to everybody. I have learned through the years that if you are looking for fast growth you will do better marketing to the demographic of people that are already practicing martial arts at your facility.

A good example of this is that for about 10 years I tried to enroll more women in my Jiu Jitsu class and I did a lot of marketing for women. I was throwing away thousands of dollars on marketing to a demographic that just wasn't interested in that particular style of martial arts at the time.

Many years have gone by and that example is not relevant today but it might be relevant to other school owners. The moral of this story is simple that the response

is much greater when I advertise specifically for my target market. I knew women NEEDED Jiujiitsu for practical self defense but I also knew they WANTED Kickboxing. So, I marketed a women's kickboxing class and I funnelled them into my Jiujiitsu program. One of those women became a world champion in Japan.



My main martial arts academy in Wisconsin has about 100 men and women on the mats each night.



When I wrote this E-book in the 90's I was putting ads in newspapers, phone books and anywhere else that could get noticed by the public. Someone starting a martial arts school now has a huge advantage in marketing using social media. What seemed like a good idea 20 plus years ago is now a great idea! With social media marketing a business owner of any kind can market to any specific audience they want. Targeted social media marketing not only targets your specific customers in specific regions but we can also check analytics now to see how our ads are performing. My target market changes monthly now depending on how full my enrollment is. My kids classes are always at 95-100% capacity and I have lots of men and women in Jiu Jitsu, Kickboxing and Kung Fu. With today's technology

we can also split test ads for marketing. Split testing means that we run 2 ads at the same time on social media. When the ads are finished running we look at the analytics and choose a winner. We then put the winning ad against a new ad and we do this until we have an unbeatable ad that always wins. This is so valuable to us that I actually will never run an ad anywhere again if I am not able to look at specific analytics for each ad. You would be extremely surprised at what ads actually worked and which ones didn't. Marketing companies use this strategy and charge thousands of dollars each month to run ads.

Create a Sales Funnel

My #1 class for adults at my academy is Brazilian Jiu Jitsu and my #1 class for kids is my advanced team leader class. Every martial arts academy is different but at Third Heaven Martial Arts I feel that the Brazilian Jiu Jitsu class and the Team Leader classes are the most effective and important classes for self defense, health and wellness and just overall awesomeness. The strange thing is that no one contacts me about these programs. As a 3rd degree black in Brazilian Jiu Jitsu with lineage going right back to the source of Jiu Jitsu you would think my phone would be ringing off the hook for jiu jitsu lessons but that simply isn't the case. I receive less than a dozen calls a year from people specifically interested in Jiu Jitsu.

My classes are packed because I use a funnel system. For 45 minutes a day we have a beginner friendly, non contact, high energy kickboxing class. There are no uniforms, no long term contracts and people of all ages and abilities working out together. This class is a ranked system using belt ranks all the way to black belt and the system is fairly easy to go through in comparison to other martial arts. This is the funnel that gets adults feeling comfortable in class and wanting more, this is the funnel that leads them all to our jiu-jitsu program. This class is outlined perfectly in my online system at teamthirdheaven.com. If your last name is Gracie or you recently won the UFC or Bellator you might not need this funnel but for me it was and continues to be a game changer.



The people pictured above didn't start out as leaders but every person here became black belts and went on to become leaders. Always be on the lookout for the next leader in your martial arts academy.

Assess your school's strengths and weaknesses

To be a black belt you will have to overcome all of your weaknesses and magnify your strengths, you will also need to do this as a successful school owner.

When I first began Jiu jitsu, I had a horrible guard. That means I wasn't very good at fighting off of my back. I was studying Judo and I was taking private wrestling lessons. I always went for the takedown and the top position. I rarely ended up on my back so I never had to learn how to use and develop my jiu jitsu guard. One evening I was rolling pretty light with one of my purple belts and when I went for a transition my thumb got caught on the mat and it dislocated. This was 20 years ago but I still remember looking down at my thumb and seeing it was facing the wrong direction and almost passing out. I didn't have insurance at the time and I didnt have money so I did what I am sure every super tough Jiu jitsu fighter would do. I tried to put my thumb back in place. I actually had my students try and put my thumb back while I screamed obscenities loud enough for half the town to hear me. I strongly recommend not putting a dislocated thumb back in place this way! We ended up making it a lot worse and now my thumb was still facing the wrong direction but it was actually facing a different wrong direction if you can believe that! I had no choice but to go to the hospital. It took several doctors and lots of morphine to put my thumb back.



For 6 months I couldn't use my right hand. Being right hand dominant I couldn't seem to get a takedown and I couldn't get any top control while grappling and everytime I tried I would bump my thumb and end up in excruciating pain. After a week of frustration I decided to just put my hand in my belt and grapple one handed for 6 months. I wrestled every day with one arm and I worked off my back in the guard position for every match as I wasn't able to correctly execute takedowns. After 6 months of training like this my guard became unstoppable and my Jiu Jitsu leveled up. Prior to the thumb injury I could have just started half of my matches on my back or even just put an arm in my belt. I didn't have to tear my thumb apart to get this kind of training. Now twenty years later I still have my students put their hands in their belts and learn to fight off of their backs. Similar strategies can be taught for other martial arts. For example; When my boxing students come to their first class, they are usually "knock out artists" with their rights and are lazy with their left. The first class is many times spent only working that left jab and we end every class with 50 lead hand punches.

You are going to go through trials and challenges as a martial arts school owner and in order to grow and survive you will need to look for the blessings in each struggle you face. In this situation while I was getting my thumb put back in place one of the employees at the hospital was Tim Stephens. Tim was a college

wrestler looking for a place to continue grappling. Tim ended up becoming my first BJJ black belt and his wrestling experience greatly enhanced my jiu jitsu. Tim has been one of the most influential people to ever walk into my martial arts academy and I possibly never would have met him if I wouldn't have injured my thumb.



Tim received the first degree BJJ black belt the day I received my 3rd degree.



Worksheet for chapter one

Plan a routine to develop your business success.

Who are the leaders you admire and keep in touch with?

In the chart below, list your school's 5 greatest strengths and 5 weaknesses.

Strengths Weakness

(add chart)

Now what can you do to strengthen your weaknesses and how will you magnify your strengths?

What are the excuses you are making for your business?

Define your target market.

Brainstorm for your mission statement.



Chapter Two Yellow Belt Courage

It takes courage to succeed in life. A person must take calculated risks and learn quickly from failures. The yellow belt level of success is designed to increase your awareness of your own internal level of courage.

Everyday Courage

We use a lot of call backs in my kid's martial arts class. For example when I say "what do strong eyes show?" The entire class will yell "COURAGE!" I will then say "courage is always doing the right thing", and the class will respond with "even if you are afraid." So at my martial arts academy we define courage as doing what is right, even if you are afraid. It takes courage to walk into a martial arts class for the first time. It is probably easier to get a black belt than a white belt because of the amount of courage it genuinely takes to get started in the martial arts.



Courage has a lot to do with self-respect, confidence and self-esteem. Courage is defined in the dictionary as bravery, fearlessness, and daring. I don't think that is entirely correct. I feel that courage means not being held captive by your fears. People who lack courage won't do something that they want to do, because they fear the consequence. They won't get out of an abusive relationship because they fear what might happen to them. They won't speak their true feelings because they fear what others would think. They remain day after day in a dead-end job, because they actually fear success. They won't make new friends or pursue new relationships, because they fear being rejected. They won't help someone in need, because they fear being involved. The only thing they try their hardest to do is not change, because they are afraid of change in any form. Mostly, people who lack courage sit around feeling sorry for themselves.

People who lack courage hope to win the lottery. They hope the perfect spouse will find them, sweep them off their feet and take care of them for the rest of their lives. They like to daydream about the perfect life, but have no plan or intention of actually achieving it. They watch a lot of television, and imagine themselves on MTV Cribs, or Who Wants to be a Millionaire. They know what they want, but often won't admit it even to themselves, for fear of never achieving it.



People learn courage when they do something new and then put it to use in a difficult situation. If you know me on a personal level you may know that I am obsessed with fishing. My son is a fishing guide and I have a family Youtube fishing channel called Fighting the Fish. My favorite tournament bass angler is a guy named Mike Iaconelli or Ike for short. Ike grew up in the inner city of New Jersey and he didn't fit the mold of a traditional southern Texas tournament bass fisherman. Ike listened to rap music, liked break dancing and didn't have "the look" of every other tournament bass fishing angler in the 90s. In Ike's book "Fishing on the Edge" he talks about how scared he was to launch a boat for the first time and how just trailering an expensive bass boat caused lots of anxiety. He talked about how no one could ever believe a city kid from Jersey could compete against southern bass fisherman. In 1999 Ike won over a million dollars in the Bass Master Classic. The most prestigious fishing tournament in the world. That win was only the start of his career but he faced tremendous adversity getting to that event and his courage paved the way for anglers like my own son to have a future in the sport.

Face Your Fears Quickly

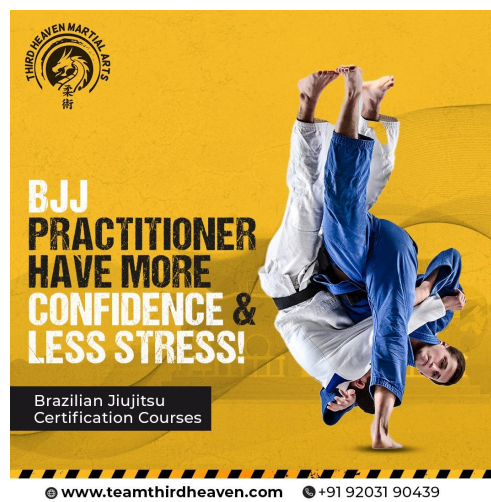
I was teaching a leadership class in martial arts a few years ago and we were all discussing courage. We came to the conclusion that the way to overcome your

fear is to face it and to face it quickly. After sometime one of the young students asked me what my biggest fear was and I told them it used to be heights. I was deathly afraid of heights but when I was 19 years old I got a job as a roofer. I was forced to climb a huge ladder and work on the top of houses all day long. I needed the job, I didn't want to let the other workers down and I was really embarrassed to admit my fear of heights. I climbed those ladders, visibility shaking every single day until one day the fear was completely gone. The kids asked if I had any other fears and I told them that while I have overcome my fear for heights I was deathly afraid of snakes. I always use the joke that you can't arm lock a snake! The next week in class, with no warning at all one of the kids brought his pet snake to class. The whole class was really proud of me for holding the snake but admittedly that is one fear I have yet to fully overcome.



Look closely! That is Sammy the Snake I'm holding!

When I started my martial arts academy in the early 90's I started in the small town of Beaver Dam, WI. There are several large cities near me and I really wanted to start my school in a larger demographic but I was afraid of failure. I didn't think I was a good enough martial artist so I purposely kept a very small dojo for many years. As I write this I still have my dojo in Beaver Dam, WI. Today students and instructors travel from all of those large cities to train and learn from us in the little town of Beaver Dam. When I look back I am 100% positive that I could have started in that large city. The only thing I lacked was confidence or courage. I still have the same dojo in Beaver Dam, WI but we have outgrown 3 locations and I also have affiliate schools all around the world. I am not a better martial artist today than I was 20 years ago. Twenty years ago my absolute mad obsession for Jiu Jitsu would have made up for any of my lack of experience in teaching. Confidence and courage are often the difference between success and failure.



Overcoming failures

According to Thomas Edison, one of the greatest inventors of all time, “If I find 10,000 ways something won't work, I haven't failed. I am not discouraged, because every wrong attempt discarded is just one more step forward. Unfortunately, many of life's failures are experienced by people who did not realize how close they were to success when they gave up.”

Everyone fails, but your perception of failure will determine your success in life. If you have the right attitude, then failures can actually be your jump start to success. The martial art of Brazilian Jiu Jitsu or submission grappling is a perfect example of how we can accomplish great things by overcoming failures. Think back to your first lesson. How many times did the instructor correct your technique? How many times did you get thrown? Was it difficult to get out of bed the next morning? You kept going back to classes several times a week for one year or longer. No one will tap you out easily anymore, no one will throw you and you are probably not even sore the day after training. In this example losing made you a better person. If you would have given up after that first class you would have gained nothing, and possibly lost a little self-respect. This lesson learned in grappling and the martial arts is a lesson not just for the martial arts but it is a lesson for life.



A guy named Shawn Williams walked into my school several years ago. His hair was down to his butt, and he was wearing an old UFC t-shirt. Shawn had just quit taking lessons at a local Karate center because he didn't feel that their techniques were practical. Despite knowing all about Ultimate Fighting, he didn't know anything on the mat. I thought he was a poser, so I decided to give Shawn a really hard time that first class. I tapped him out over and over again until he excused himself to go throw up. After Shawn left that night I never expected him to return to class. (By the way, if you have the opportunity to review my video on giving the perfect intro lesson, you will know that this was not the way to do it!) Two days later Shawn returned to class. With his hair cut short I didn't even recognize him. Shawn took another beating from us that night. Shawn never quit and today he runs one of my JiuJitsu academies. On a good day it takes me about 20 minutes to tap this guy out now, and he's only 135 pounds!

We will have to endure many challenges in our lives. To be a true leader you will have to embrace failure. Be grateful for the learning opportunity. As the saying goes, what doesn't kill me, makes me stronger.

Building on chapter one, training is very important in facing obstacles. As stated before, you wouldn't step into the ring cold and unprepared. You should always train like a champion, because there will be times in your life where you will need to



rely on your past experience to survive. You can gain courage two ways: from training, and from doing what scares you. You may have courage that comes from knowing that you are prepared, and you may draw courage from knowing that you have overcome great trials.



Worksheet for Chapter Two

What are the goals you wish to achieve and have not done so yet?

What are the specific reasons or fears that hold you back? Why?

How can you overcome your fear or remove these roadblocks?

Do you have a past experience that you can draw courage from in difficult circumstances?

How have you learned important lessons from past failures?

How can you build up your own courage?

How can you teach courage to your students?



Chapter Three Orange Belt

Integrity and Humility

Integrity

Almost every martial arts school that I have come across claims to teach several life skills including integrity. But what is integrity? According to the dictionary, “integrity is the state of being whole.” When I think of integrity the other words that come to mind are honesty, truth, honor and uprightness. The word integrity actually comes from the Latin word integritas. The root word “integer” in math is often used to refer to a whole number, meaning untouched, intact and entire. I believe a person with integrity is complete. When a person has integrity they are the same person no matter where they are or what people they are with. People with integrity do not pretend to be people that they are not.

I was teaching a Brazilian Jiu Jitsu seminar in Texas for a student that joined my affiliation as a purple belt. This person had supposedly been training for almost as long as I have but their instructor would no longer promote them in Jiu Jitsu do to an injury they sustained in combat. This person's story really pulled at my heart and I felt compelled to promote them to brown belt almost immediately. After promoting



them to brown belt I had them on what I would consider the fast track to black belt. I traveled to Texas several times to help this student but I was starting to see some major red flags. His combat injuries prevented him from doing fundamental Jiu Jitsu techniques but I saw him doing other work out exercises that made me question the significance of his injuries. I also had several of his students tell me that he doesn't wear a jiu jitsu gi and that he rarely teaches classes, in fact he only showed up while I was there so he could get promoted. If you can believe this, when it came time to train and roll with all of his students this person took a break to have a cigarette and a mountain dew. This is so strange that it doesn't even seem believable but it did happen. I questioned him about this decision and he said that his anxiety is really bad because of things he experienced in war. Once again I felt bad for him and at the very least I was going to give him a stripe on his brown belt. Before his belt promotion I rolled with his top student who taught most of his jiu jitsu classes. I am not a high level competitor and I really don't even think I am a super tough guy but this student made me look like Rickson Gracie in his prime. It was almost as if this "instructor" had never even seen jiu jitsu before. With all the red flags I decided against that belt promotion. Instead of promoting him to his next stripe on the brown belt I decided to give him some very specific techniques to work on. Now usually no one asks me about belt promotions so I didn't think this would be an issue since he didn't know he was getting promoted anyways. Unfortunately after that seminar



he told me if he didn't get the promotion and the black belt ASAP he would leave my affiliation. He did in fact leave and received a black belt just months later from a very well known Jiu Jitsu instructor. He told that instructor that he trained with me for many years but I would not promote him due to injuries he sustained in the war. This exact scenario has happened 2 times to me now and in both cases my integrity and the integrity and honor of our entire martial arts system remained intact.

A lot of martial arts schools preach integrity to their students, they write the word "integrity" in big vinyl letters on the walls of their schools. At the end of the day, some of those instructors bow off of the mats and integrity follows them home. These instructors are complete people and live by a moral and ethical code.

Integrity builds trust with others and results in a solid reputation for you and your martial arts school. When you are consistent in making decisions based on your moral code, others will notice. Your role and influence as a leader will grow.

Humility

Humility is one of the first lessons learned when starting martial arts training. It is also the most important. Humility allows us to admit defeat, learn from our



mistakes, and move on to the next challenge. Without humility, a person becomes stuck, unable to make progress.

Over my many years of teaching, I have seen the lack of humility cause the downfall of several students. A new student will sign up and be full of enthusiasm for the martial arts, but they have the wrong attitude. One student, let's call him Charlie, a teenager, was very excited about his first classes. His form was pretty bad, but that's to be expected from any beginner, and I always let it slide for a few classes. We are actually very good at correcting techniques at Third Heaven Martial Arts. We use the three C's. Compliment, Correct and Compliment again. That means I might say something like "Wow Charlie you have some awesome power in your punches, now to punch like a black belt just keep that rear hand up, great job now you're punching like a black belt." We teach this way and it usually goes well but not for Charlie to my surprise, he would have none of it! "I want to do it this way," he would say, "I know how to punch!" With every punch, his elbows would fly up like chicken wings and he would lean so far forward he sometimes lost his balance. I'm not harsh when I teach, so there was no need for him to be defensive. I did my best to convince him that I knew what I was talking about, but he thought he knew better than me with my many years of training, sparring, and competing. Charlie's pride would not let him admit that he didn't know anything



about the martial arts. He didn't last very long as a student, which is a shame, because he was so excited at first. I don't quite understand how someone would come to me as a student and then not be open to learning what I have to teach. Unfortunately, their problem is that they do not want to humble themselves to learn. They believe that if they change something about themselves, it must mean that they have something wrong with them in the first place. Charlie did not want to improve his technique, because he did not want to admit that he was doing it wrong. By not having humility and being open to wise instruction, a person could never hope to improve themselves in any area.

The lesson of humility also applies to running a martial arts school or any business. We are all used to being the head honcho at our schools and sometimes forget that we are students too. We would be wise to remain humble and take constructive criticism to heart. Over the years I have traveled to countless martial arts academies. One thing that seems constant at every martial arts academy I visit is that the more confident an individual instructor is in his/her abilities the more humble they are. As an example when I was training with UFC and MMA legend Royce Gracie he never asked me to call him sir, master or sensei, he never expected me to bow to him and even though he is an absolute legend in the martial arts he treated me and his other students with absolute respect and humility. The



more an instructor boasts of his/her credentials and demands respect from his students the more likely that instructor is suffering from a lack of humility and maybe even a lack of martial arts training. This is a very challenging topic for martial arts instructors and it is not one that is easily discussed in person. If a professional martial arts academy is struggling with adult enrollment, this lack of humility on the instructor's part is almost always the main reason for the lack of enrollment.

Willingness to Learn

Humility and a strong willingness to learn go hand in hand. A student's success and that includes my students that I coach in business is usually a direct reflection of their willingness to learn new things. Adam owned a traditional Tae Kwon Do school about an hour away from me. I spent a lot of time at his school teaching fundamental Jiu Jitsu to some of his higher ranked Tae Kwon Do students. Adam was and still is a really nice professional person. Adam started his martial arts academy in the 80s and he is older than me by about 15 years. Even though his dojo was the nicest looking martial arts school in the area and he was a really good teacher he just couldn't get people to walk through the doors anymore. Unfortunately Adam's marketing never changed from 1980-2019 and he just couldn't understand why his old ways of marketing didn't work anymore. Sensei

Adam refused to try any marketing on social media and kept throwing his money away in phone book and newspaper ads. I have personally helped people make millions of dollars using social media marketing but he wasn't interested in learning this skill from me. In 2020 just prior to the pandemic lockdown Adam closed his doors permanently and retired from the martial arts. Adam's martial arts academy was home to thousands of students over the years including a junior olympic champion but in the end he only had 5 students left. It isn't easy to learn new skills when you have been doing the same things for decades but in this situation a stronger willingness to learn could have saved his martial arts school.

As professional martial artists we should always keep an open mind and be on the lookout for new business strategies as well as new martial arts skills. There is a saying that goes "you don't know, what you don't know" I have to remind myself of that all the time.



Influence

As a martial arts instructor you have a huge impact on people's lives. The influence you have on your students may be greater than television, music and in some cases even parents! The personal relationship that we as teachers have with our students is nonexistent in most other professions. As teachers and leaders we have a moral responsibility to uphold the highest standards of ethics and values in our schools. Leading with integrity is the best investment you can make for the future of your martial arts program.

The personal standards of an instructor should be higher than the standards of his students. According to British author Samuel Johnson, "knowledge without integrity is dangerous and dreadful." Living by a set of principles and not straying from them for personal gain shows integrity. In the world we live in, it is too easy to take shortcuts to success and power and give up our personal integrity for a little extra money. I would challenge you to ask yourself how much your integrity is worth.

I have made plenty of mistakes. I have regretfully done things in the past that put my integrity at risk. I am sorry for those mistakes and I have become a better person through this realization. When I see a martial arts school struggling it is usually because of a lack of integrity. Sadly, in a 60 mile radius from my academy there is a martial arts instructor that has been grooming underage boys for many



years, there is an instructor that has dated and embezzled money from most of his female students and another instructor that has been selling drugs out of his dojo. With this kind of competition I don't even need to be a great teacher, I just need to maintain my integrity.

Worksheet for chapter three

Are you the same person outside of class that you represent in the dojo?

Do you make the best decisions for your students when other choices would seem to benefit you more?

Do you sometimes give belt promotions to students at times only because it benefits you financially?

What could happen to your school if you were to act without integrity?

Why must a leader have integrity?

Define your personal values. Why would you never compromise them?

Do you willingly accept constructive criticism or advice?



Chapter Four Green Belt Vision

Vision

Being unfocused is one of the most common barriers to running a successful martial arts school. To become focused, the first thing you need is to visualize your future.

Your vision is what you focus on to keep your school growing in the right direction.

You need to formulate a vision for your school and then implement it in day-to-day activities. Once you have filled out the worksheet for this chapter, bring it all together in a cohesive vision statement. Post it in your office and give a copy to each of the other leaders in your school. Keep the vision alive by taking another step closer to your goal every day. You may even choose to share your vision statement with all of your students. This will let the students know how important they are to you and the future of the school.



As you write your vision statement, don't be afraid to think big! Seriously, let go of your fears and create a mental image of the perfect school. We tend to achieve what we believe we can accomplish. If we can enlarge our vision and really believe in it, and ourselves, we can accomplish anything. As I look back on my martial arts academy over the years, the amount of students I have and my physical location is an exact reflection of what I have believed I could accomplish.

"I have two large rooms at my academy. The larger of the two rooms is used for Jiu Jitsu, Judo, kickboxing and the kids programs. The smaller room has a ½ sized professional MMA cage or boxing ring and is primarily used for our fight team. My school isn't as "ghetto" as the boxing gym in Rocky 2 but it also isn't quite as nice as many of the fancy dojos in strip malls. I see roughly 100 students a day and I work 3 days a week." It is kind of mind blowing that I wrote this statement 20 years ago because anyone that reads it now will see that it is the EXACT description of my current martial arts academy. I also found a note that said I would be conducting belt promotions for 100 people at a time. I have not accomplished that yet as most of my belt graduations have been approximately 60-70 students. Seeing that note made my belief grow stronger. I will also accomplish that within the next year. You might be wondering why I don't simply change my vision statement to something like, "I have 4 large rooms, a day care center, an indoor



pool, 10 UFC champions and a briefcase with one million dollars in cash in my office.” The reason I don’t simply make my vision statement like this is because it has to be believable in order to be achievable. My belief has definitely increased as the years have gone by though maybe someday I will aim for that indoor pool.

In creating a vision for your business, I would recommend spending time meditating on “exactly” what you want to achieve. Think about these goals for your martial arts academy as if you have already achieved them. Currently, I believe we will have new carpeting, flooring and mats for my dojo. Once you have a clear vision in your mind, write it down. Don’t type it, actually write it. Then speak your vision out loud each and every day. There is a lot of power in thoughts and words, I don’t claim to totally understand the method in which this works but I believe it is real.

Worksheet for Chapter Four

If you want to achieve greatness with your martial arts school you are going to need a great vision. Take a moment to daydream about your ideal school. Keep this image in your mind as you answer the following questions on a separate sheet of paper. Use as much detail as possible.

What does your martial arts academy look like (inside and out)?

Who is there? What are they doing?

What are the moral values your school teaches and what do you prioritize?

What do you love about teaching martial arts?

What does your daily schedule look like?

How do you feel about owning this school?

How will you enrich your student's lives?

How does your school impact your community?

What are people saying about you, your students, and your school?

What else can you visualize?





Chapter Five Blue Belt Strategy

Strategy

For many years now, I have considered myself to be more of a teacher than a fighter. I love to build up my team. I enjoy coaching and training all of my students. I will be the first to admit that pre-fight jitters are the main reason I do not fight much. But if there is one thing that will get me motivated and willing to fight, it is a personal challenge!

When I opened my second martial arts academy in 2001, I was harassed by one of the other local martial arts schools. I wasn't that surprised because I know people will talk, especially when they feel that financial stability is threatened. This school went too far with their personal attacks and made open challenges to both me and my students. I'd like to be friends with everyone, but the insults of my school and my integrity were uncalled for.



A previous instructor of mine once told me, “The best way to avoid a fight is to have no enemies.” That is great advice, but no matter what we do, we all end up with rivals. I think better advice would be to know your adversary. Untrustworthy people will make enemies out of anyone regardless of how you treat them. After much internal deliberation, I decided to write the head instructor a letter stating that I do not look for fights, however I also do not back down from personal challenges. I agreed to fight the instructor in a public mixed martial arts event.

With the challenge accepted, I had eight weeks to prepare for the fight. The event took place in Racine, WI at the Freestyle Combat Challenge hosted by UFC fighter Dave Strasser. Most of my students and many people from my town were coming to watch. The pre-fight jitters hit hard and I did not sleep much during those eight weeks.

My opponent was training hard every day. He was doing conditioning, running, lifting, swimming, boxing, and kickboxing. To win this fight I needed a strategy. I figured the longer the fight lasted, the more opportunities he might find to win, so I wanted to end the fight quickly. My opponent made several negative comments about grappling during the last few months prior to the fight that showed his ignorance. I knew he didn’t have a clue on the ground. My game plan was to take him down and submit him.



Developing a strategy

The first step in developing a strategy is to understand your strengths and weaknesses. I sat down and evaluated my strengths and weaknesses. For this fight my strength was the ground. I can apply submissions from all angles, I can also strike fairly well on the ground. I have good stamina and conditioning. My weaknesses were poor takedowns and mediocre stand up skills. For the next eight weeks, I worked diligently on improving my stand up game and my take downs.

Next, I needed to assess my opponent's abilities. His greatest threat, so to speak, was that I didn't know much about him. There was a bit of mystery regarding what he had in his arsenal. I knew he had a black belt in Tae Kwon Do, but I didn't know what other disciplines he had trained or his level in any cross training. I did know however, that my opponent was larger than me, liked to punch, was former military and taught Tae Kwon Do. I concluded that my opponent's main threat was the knockout. If he could beat me, he would have to knock me out. Keeping this in mind, I didn't take the fight lightly. The last thing I needed was to get knocked out in front of my hometown crowd.

The Night of the Fight

I was going over my strategy backstage with my cornerman, Henry Matamoros. Matamoros made it clear that I was not fighting for fun, prize money or respect. I was fighting for the reputation of my entire school and Brazilian Jiu Jitsu. Matamoros told me that there was no way I could lose, “You will take the guy down, submit him and it will be done,” he told me.

The ring announcer called my name and we walked through fog and laser lights down to the ring. My heart raced and for a second I wondered what the *heck* I had gotten myself into! When I stepped up to the ring the crowd roared. I looked in the direction of my team and they were on their feet screaming. “Don’t look at them. Just focus on the fight,” Henry said. I don’t remember anything else before the fight. I actually can’t even recall when my opponent entered the ring or what the announcer said.

The bell rang and the whole auditorium seemed to go silent. All of a sudden, I felt very calm. I was in my element, and I knew exactly what to do. My opponent swung at me with a hard right, but I struck him with a quick left jab. “Take him down,” I thought. I tackled him with a double leg but when we hit the mat he rolled me over and ended up in the top position. He was on top of me in side control throwing



strong punches, but luckily for me nothing landed. Actually the more I train and prepare the luckier I get. I put him in my guard. I attempted an elevator sweep but he kept his base and continued to strike at me. I caught his arm for the armbar. He tried to stack me, so I spun under him with a corkscrew arm bar, keeping his arm. He was still punching with his left but nothing connected. I cranked on the arm and I felt it tighten, several quick satisfying pops, the arm went limp and backwards!

The ref pulled me off of my opponent, then my whole team jumped into the ring. The doctor was checking out my opponent, he was still lying on the ground grasping his arm. Then it hit me. I won the fight! Only 27 seconds and not a single scratch on me! The fight could not have gone better and I owe the victory to strategy.

The Game Plan

Every good fighter that has stepped into the ring and won has gone in with a game plan. Before any of my fighters are allowed to fight in the ring or the cage, I make sure they have been a loyal and dedicated student. Once I see that someone is ready to fight, I make sure that they have the desire and commitment to up the training intensity. I work with them on utilizing their strengths and improving upon

their weaknesses. Then we study the opponent and see how we can capitalize on his weaknesses and how to avoid his strengths.

Many students have no desire to fight in a Mixed Martial Arts event, they train for self defense, physical fitness and fun. Even in a self defense situation, when we do not have the opportunity to study our opponent, we still develop strategies. In class we talk about anticipating different scenarios like “what if the person has a knife,” or “what if there are multiple attackers.”

Time and time again, I am amazed at the fact that a martial arts instructor will spend so much time and effort on developing perfect strategies for fights, but they neglect to use any of these methods to develop their martial arts business. I like to say that good Brazilian Jiu Jitsu is like playing a game of chess. After practicing for many years, you will develop a strategic mind and you will be able to see many moves ahead of your opponent. When you drive in your car, do you only look a few feet in front of your car or do you look further down the road to anticipate the traffic ahead of you?



Worksheet for Chapter Five

Have you trained for long enough to be confident in your ability to teach?

Have your assistant instructors trained long enough that you are confident in their teaching abilities?

How can you use your strengths to improve your school?

Do you know the strengths and weaknesses of the other schools in your area?

Considering the vision you have for your school (from chapter four), how can you achieve it?

Are you willing to consider business advice from others?

Do you have a specific plan to grow your school? What is it?



Chapter Six Purple Belt

Problem Solving

The Name Game

About seven years ago, Rob stopped in for a free trial lesson. He was very interested in classes, but had a demanding work schedule and did not last long as a student. Over the years, many students have come and gone and when someone disappears after only a few classes, I must admit that I seldom remember their name. The reason I remember Rob is because in his first lesson with me he had mentioned that he had tried classes at another martial arts school, but he decided to join ours instead. Naturally, I asked him why he picked our school. Of course, I was hoping he would say that our skills are better and that we offer more practical training. The answer I got was very different. Rob said that after three classes at the other martial arts school, the head instructor had forgotten his name and that



offended him. Rob went on to say that if the teacher can't even remember his name, he must not care much about having him as a student.

In 1995 I attended a seminar given by Brazilian Jiu Jitsu expert Royce Gracie. There was a pretty large turnout for the event, approximately 70-80 students. The seminar was a two day event. On the first day Royce went around and personally introduced himself to everyone at the seminar. The next day Royce came over to my partner and me and to correct a technique. "Watch, Justin, the technique is like this." I could not believe Royce had remembered my name! There were so many of us in the room. We were all white belts wearing plain white gis. I watched Royce that day go around and it seemed like he knew everyone's name. I don't know how he did it, but I know it made a difference, and it made the seminar much more personal.

When you teach class make sure to say everyone's name at least two or three times during the class. Don't just use their name when correcting them, but make sure to use their name in a positive way. For instance when you praise their technique. A good rule of thumb is to always use the person's name as you greet them when they enter the school. Use their name in class to praise their technique, and then again when they leave to say goodbye. This will not only exemplify your

care for each individual, but the repetition will serve to assist you in recalling their names.

Show a Genuine Interest in your Students

Many years ago, I was invited to take a seminar hosted by Brazilian JiuJitsu black belt Professor Pedro Sauer. I did not want to go to the seminar. At the time I was a little burned out on JiuJitsu and just wanted the weekend off. Although I did not want to go, a few of my students were going and they talked me into coming along. I was immediately impressed by his style of JiuJitsu and I was happy that I went. I rolled for a little bit with a few of the guys after the seminar. Overall I had a good time and learned a few new techniques. At that time I had no intention of ever becoming an affiliate school for Pedro Sauer. As I was about to leave, Pedro came over to me and asked about the Third Heaven Martial Arts patch that I had on my gi. He said he really liked my logo and asked me lots of questions about my school. I talked about my school for about 15 minutes while he listened. The next day I emailed him to apply to be an affiliate school.

I have been a loyal student of his ever since, and I'm very happy to have him as my teacher. I probably would have never signed up if he had not taken the time to ask me about myself and show a genuine interest in me and my school. **I wrote



this section many years ago and I actually left this association before I earned my black belt. I left after a few years because I no longer felt that I was appreciated or important in his affiliate network. ** This paragraph isn't meant to be disrespectful to a very well known and legendary martial arts instructor. I almost deleted this section but I left it in because I think it is a good reminder that people will always remember how we make them feel. I try really hard to remember this on a daily basis. I always say hi to my students when they walk in. I always use their names, I ask them about their days and I try really hard to connect personally with all of my students.

When you have a new or potential new student in class, you should take the time to listen to them and ask them questions about their interests. Give your student a chance to talk and show sincere interest in them. Ask them about their career or academic school. By showing an interest in others and allowing them time to speak, you will find that people will like you more and it will be easier to recruit new students.

Several years ago, I met with an insurance agent regarding a dispute that I had with my premium. I wasn't pleased with my current insurance and I was hoping to get a lower rate. My old insurance agent had just quit her job and I was about to meet her replacement. While I was waiting in my new agent's office, I noticed



several trophies and pictures of him with a race car. When he came into the office and introduced himself to me, the first thing I said was, “Wow, those are some impressive trophies!” I went on to ask him questions about racing something which I knew nothing about. I don’t even like car racing, but I pretended to be interested. He talked to me for about 20 minutes about his experiences with driving and sponsoring race car drivers. When we finally got around to discussing business he was more than willing to help me with my insurance problems. When I was about to leave his office he stopped me and said, “You know, I am getting a little older and I have been looking for a good person to take over and drive some of the local races.” He continued, saying, “You seem like a good person. If you would like to learn how to drive race cars, I would give you a full sponsorship in racing!” I graciously declined the offer, but to this day I am still amazed at what can be achieved just by showing a sincere interest in others.

Problem Solving

I am not a physically strong person. Sometimes when I grapple people that are inexperienced, they will make comments about how strong I am. In fact, I just have good technique and they mistake skill for strength. When grappling a larger and stronger person, many times I have to let them launch their attack while I just wait



out the storm. If my defense is good, I can usually let them wear themselves down before I try to win the match.

This mentality is also good for dealing with personal disputes. If a student comes to you with a complaint about the school, it is best to just listen until they are finished. Don't interrupt even if you disagree with them. As you begin your response, let them know that you really care about them as a student and that you want to help them. You don't always have to answer a complaint right away. Tell your student or client that you appreciate them coming to you and that you may need a day or two to consider their problem. Many times the person just wants to be heard, and simply talking about the problem will satisfy them. I recently had a student that was frustrated with classes. He has been dealing with some injuries and in class he has been working with a lot of beginner students in class. He wasn't feeling like he was learning anything. As soon as it got back to me that he mentioned this to another student, I called him immediately. During the phone call I didn't offer any advice or solutions, I just listened. I am positive that simply by providing him an open and willing ear, I saved a student from quitting.



When dealing with a complaint remember to always:

Listen. Figure out the whole problem.

Express your personal concern.

Thank the person for bringing the complaint to your attention.

Ask them how they would want to resolve the problem.

Worksheet for Chapter Six

What are some ways that you have shown a genuine interest in your students?

How have you made a positive impact on the lives of your students?

What was the last problem that was brought to you by a student and how did you handle the situation?

Do you usually use your students' names when addressing them?

Would you feel personally offended if a student complained about a problem he or she had with someone or something at your school?

Can you anticipate specific problems at your school before they occur?

Do your assistant instructors know how to field complaints?

Chapter Seven Brown Belt

Self-Discipline

Self-discipline

Self-discipline has been defined as the ability to work hard to reach goals. But more than that, self-discipline is the ability to stay concentrated on a goal. Even through hardships and many difficulties, a person with self-discipline will endure until their task is complete. I believe that self-discipline is mental toughness combined with self-control. The first coach for the Green Bay Packers said this about self discipline and mental toughness:

"Mental toughness is many things and rather difficult to explain. Its qualities are sacrifice and self-denial. Also, most importantly, it is combined with a perfectly disciplined will that refuses to give in. It's a state of mind-you could call it character in action."

— Vince Lombardi



The greatest struggle on the path to success is self-discipline. Oftentimes the effort we put into disciplining ourselves is the very key to our success.

When I was very young, my father began teaching me how to play the guitar. Since then, I have played with many bands. Although I have never been in a musical group that ‘made it’, I have accomplished certain personal goals in music. I am always impressed and amazed at the stories I hear from professional musicians. I think a lot of people see a band on MTV or hear them on the radio and think, “Wow! These guys are lucky they made it.” The truth is, luck may play a small part in a band making it to the top, but self- discipline plays the bigger role.

When I was a teenager, I went to see a band at a small club in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. There were only a handful of people there to see the unknown band Soul Asylum. Three years later they played for the President’s Inauguration Party. They landed the show because of their MTV video ‘Runaway Train’ that actually helped bring several runaway kids back home. Sometime later, I was invited to a small, local party and given a demo tape of the unknown band that was going to play there. I really liked the demo tape, but I had other plans and never made it to the party. The band that played that night was Green Day. When we hear the buzz about the latest band to hit it big, we don’t realize that the members may have been playing small-time shows for years, sleeping every night in their cars, and never

having enough money for food. Not to mention the countless hours of rehearsal time. I often wonder how many bands were just about to make it when they gave up. The ones that became rich and famous were not lucky, but rather disciplined themselves to make their own way.

If you have chosen martial arts for your profession, there is no doubt that you will have to sacrifice and struggle to be successful.

I remember watching Renzo Gracie defeat the Sambo expert Oleg Taktarov in a Mixed Martial Arts event many years ago. Renzo finished Oleg with an upward kick from the guard after only a minute or so into the fight. After the fight people asked Renzo if he felt he got in a lucky strike. Renzo replied, "The more I train the luckier I get."

If you want to succeed at something in this life, my advice would be to first decide what is meaningful to you. Then make some reasonable goals to reach it. You must stay focused on the goals and achieve them no matter what. In my Jiu Jitsu academy, I tell people there is no shame in tapping out if your arm is going to break or if you are going to get injured, but that's it. We do not tap because we are tired, we do not tap because we think we might lose, and we never tap out of frustration. In life, we also can't tap out and call it a day just because things do not go according to plan.

Remain Enthusiastic

Having enthusiasm and being excited about a project is easy when things are going well, but when we hit stumbling blocks, this is a much more difficult feeling to achieve. It will help if you make small, reasonable goals and deadlines for the goals that you can achieve. By creating many smaller goals you will be able to see your progress, and should be able to stay more excited about the tasks you have set out to accomplish.

It is important to note that enthusiasm and success can both be given to us or taken away from us by the people that we associate with. If you are always interacting with people that bring you down mentally and do nothing to stimulate your desire to achieve your dreams, you will probably not succeed. There was a time that I associated with people that had negative attitudes about everything. I was trying to be a better person and follow my passion and dreams while still surrounded by these negative people. A pastor and friend of mine once told me regarding my situation, "If you stand on a chair and reach out your hand to lift someone up, you will probably end up falling down."

Worksheet for Chapter Seven

What methods do you use to maintain self-discipline in your training and business?

What keeps you from being as self-disciplined as you would like to be?

Do you seek out others that help you to stay focused?

What specific activities do you need more self-discipline in?

What can you gain from being more self-disciplined in a specific area?

Do you continue to have enthusiasm for your school?

Do you regularly socialize with someone who has a negative impact on you?

A promotional graphic for a kickboxing course. It features two male kickboxers in action, one in a black protective suit and the other in a black singlet, both wearing gloves and shin guards. The background is dark. In the top left corner is the Third Heaven Martial Arts logo. The text "KEEP GOING KEEP GROWING" is prominently displayed in white and yellow. Below it, a yellow banner reads "Ranked Kickboxing Certification Course". At the bottom left is a yellow button with the text "Enroll Now". At the bottom center is a globe icon followed by the website "www.teamthirdheaven.com".

**KEEP
GOING
KEEP
GROWING**

Ranked Kickboxing Certification Course

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 www.teamthirdheaven.com



Chapter Eight Black Belt

Leading Others

Ask yourself this question, “If I died today, would my school continue to grow and succeed even without me?” That is a difficult question to consider. I have learned that very successful business people think long term while unsuccessful people tend to think short term and are always looking for instant gratification. For long term success in martial arts we need to plan for the future now. I know of several instructors who have grown old and have really good schools, but they never developed leaders to fill their roles after they are gone. In a few more years the legacy of these martial arts schools will likely end. A less drastic situation could be as simple as needing to take a break for a week for an illness or a vacation. If you needed to leave your academy for any reason could it survive without you?

In 2017 I was ice fishing and I slipped on the ice and hit the back of my head. This was the hardest strike to my head that I have ever felt and doctors would later say that my jiu-jitsu training may have saved my life that day as my body was used to undergoing a certain amount of impact and trauma. I was able to continue fishing and I even caught a giant brown trout. I drove home with ringing in my ears and a weird buzzing in the back of my head but I thought I would be ok. I wasn't ok. The next day I couldn't remember who I was and to this day I am still battling the effects of a traumatic brain injury. I'm back to teaching every day but for the first year I had to rely 100% on my students. If it was not for a few really loyal leaders in my martial arts school I would have gone out of business and my legacy as a martial arts instructor would have ended.



***The Actual fish I
caught the day I
fell on the ice.***



Let's say I was leaving for a vacation and I had to choose between two people to teach my classes. The first guy is very good with people, trustworthy, and reliable, but has poor martial arts skills. The second guy is one of the best fighters on my team, but has poor people skills and is not very trustworthy. I would go with the first guy every time. I learned this the hard way many years ago when I went out of town. I chose my most gifted athlete to take over my classes for a week. When I came back, I had students injured and unhappy with the classes. Months later I even found out that this person had stolen money from me while I was gone. I was so distraught I almost closed my school. Choosing your assistant instructors carefully is crucial to the growth of your school.

Building Leaders

An important question to consider is whether we believe leadership is a learned skill or are some people simply born leaders? I strongly believe that leadership is a skill that must be learned and that it is a skill that needs constant practice and improvement. I know that if I wasn't a strong leader at the beginning of my martial arts career. I learned by reading books, listening to audio tapes and surrounding myself with strong leaders.



You can easily start to build team leaders and assistant instructors at your school. One of the most crucial steps to leadership is to have an outlined curriculum of your martial arts techniques, so that assistant instructors know what they should be teaching each class. In the Green Belt section of this book, where we discussed the topic of focus, I stated that having a specific curriculum will help to bring structure to your program and help your students make reasonable goals. Now looking at the big picture, we can see that the curriculum not only helps the students, but it helps us to build leaders.

There are many techniques you can use to train leaders in your school. Allow your potential leaders to direct warm-ups during some of the classes. You can develop leaders at a young age with this exercise by allowing even the children in kids class to lead stretches every once in a while or stand in front of the class for them to gain confidence. During your adult classes you may want to give your assistant instructors the opportunity to teach one or two techniques or if there is a new person in class, have your assistant show them some of the fundamentals.



I would also recommend that you put together a manual for your school that covers how to answer the phone, how to answer specific questions, what techniques you want new students to learn in their intro class, and how to sign up a new student. You should teach the contents of this manual to your assistants during regular instructor meetings.

I was 12 years old when I walked into Cho's Tae Kwon Do in Waukesha, WI and had my first official Martial Arts lesson. Cho's was a small, old school, karate/TKD style studio that was run by instructor Dan Monyelle and Mr. Monyelle gave a lot of people a chance at teaching classes. My first class was an introductory lesson I received from Cho's black belt assistant instructor Jeff Growel. Jeff went on to become a lifelong friend of mine and he owns his own martial arts school today. I was talking to Jeff about how almost every martial arts school in our state has a lineage that can be traced directly back to Cho's martial arts. The head instructor Dan is no longer teaching but the leadership that came out of this small Tae Kwon Do school in the late 80's transformed martial arts in my state and is responsible for about 50 professional martial arts academies.

Leadership combined with tenacity and a strong willingness to learn will always have a deep and long lasting impact on people's lives. It is my hope that this short E-book will help you expand your thinking on what you can accomplish with your martial arts academy.

-Justin Morris,

Team Third Heaven





Third Heaven Martial Arts

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