

Teaching Methods: Karate as a Way of Life

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According to Shoshin Nagamine, "The art of karate has been passed from generation to generation through oral tradition and hand-to-hand teaching" (14). In 1609, the Satsuma clan conquered the Ryukyus and forbid Okinawans from owning weapons and practicing martial arts (Nagamine 21). For the next 300 years, karate-ka practiced in secret; the task to learn and remember fell on each student to preserve the style. This also put a significant burden on the instructors. They did not have reference books or public places to watch other masters demonstrate their skills. Instructors passed on the teaching methods of those who came before them.

"Karate is a training of both mind and body, and leads one to a better understanding of both the self and the world" (Nagamine 14). Teaching karate as a way of life is not just about the specific methods we use to instruct students on how to properly execute techniques. It is also more than developing the mind, learning to set aside distractions and focus on training. The best instructors show students a better way to live by demonstrating the values of the dojo on and off deck. These are methods that we need to preserve and pass down.

Kyoshi Geoff Gaudoin breaks down his general teaching philosophy into four words: discipline, understanding, example, and patience. The instructor models discipline in their own personal training and sets a high standard for the students by requiring their personal best. Kyoshi does not automatically promote students who participate; each one must show growth to continue to the next rank. The concept of "understanding" can be interpreted as "to understand and to be understood." The instructor must be able to learn to understand each student and what they need to be successful, while also explaining things coherently so that students can absorb and apply the information. This may include adjusting exercises or explanations for different levels of physical or learning ability. The instructor leads by example, physically demonstrating

each technique. Students watch how the instructors teach and live, imitating the qualities that they want to see in their own lives; therefore, instructors have a responsibility to set a good example with their actions. Finally, the instructor must have patience when working with students, on and off the deck. Kyoshi Geoff Gaudoin lives these values, passing them on to his students and instructors.

The last dojo rule calls students to "Strive to promote the true spirit of karate through the development of character, health, skill, humility, and respect." Notable instructors in our dojo demonstrate these in their daily lives.

Shoshin Nagamine began his study of karate to improve his health. Many students are drawn to the dojo for the same reason. The teaching methods we choose must promote good health and safe training. We want to build strong and disciplined students, not tear down healthy ones by practicing techniques incorrectly.

Teaching with good character demands consistency; one must do the right thing even when no one is watching. In our dojo, Sensei Michael Barnes is an excellent example of this concept. Whether he is stepping in to clean on Friday night, walking someone to their car after dark, or covering class so that Kyoshi and Renshi can have a night off, he puts in his best work without expecting recognition. This is a trait we need to pass on to future blackbelts.

An individual must put in years of practice to develop him or herself before becoming an instructor. It is important to have skill in order to pass it on to students. Sensei John Darin consistently trains outside of class and investigates different styles of martial arts to continue sharpening his skills. This is one of the qualities that draws students to his classes; each one knows that they will learn something new about karate or about their own endurance.

Instructors are constantly learning from Kyoshi, from each other, and from students. This requires practicing humility; the highest ranking blackbelt can learn from the lowest ranking student. Humility is complemented by respect. Renshi Patricia Gaudoin's skills in karate and teaching are complemented by her ability to command respect from all students. This can be seen in how she runs the KinderKarate class; the children are not repressed but grow in character and discipline as a result of her requirement that they treat her and their parents with respect. I will continue to strive to incorporate all these methods when I teach.

Times have changed. In theory, a person could learn karate today from YouTube videos. However, they would miss out on the personal element of learning from an instructor who can pass on a better way to live. This is what preserves the style.

Works Cited

Gaudoin, Geoffrey. "Methods of Teaching." 6 July 1990. Sandan Test.

Nagamine, Shoshin. *The Essence of Okinawan Karate-Do*. Tuttle Publishing, 1976.
