

Anatomy of a Successful Martial Arts School

Sometime all that is missing from the puzzle is that one piece.... Without it, the art is incomplete. Once we identify what is missing in our studios, the puzzle is complete.

Part 2: CORE

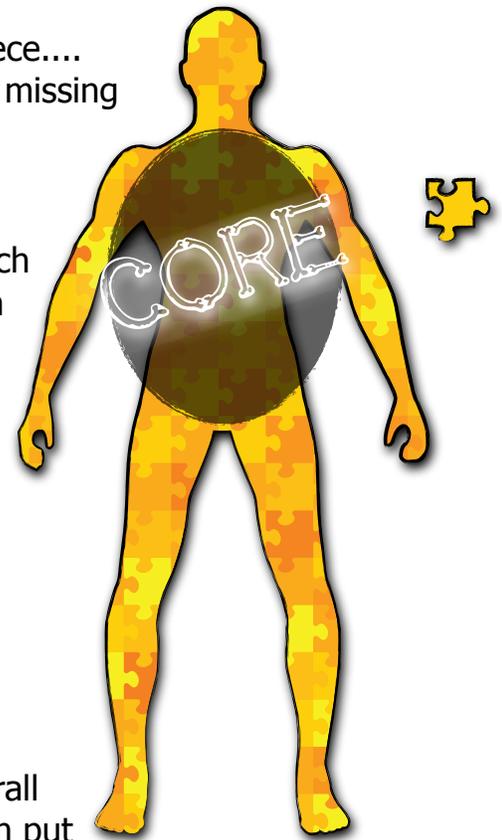
Our CORE of our company is what you teach, how you teach it and the overall experience that your clients receive when they come into your studio.

Here are 4 ways to use your C.O.R.E.!

- Curriculum
- Organization
- Relationships
- Excellence

1. Curriculum:

How you teach obviously makes a huge impact on the overall quality of your program. Remember, however, that you can put make-up on a pig, but it's still a pig! This isn't meant to be offensive to the curriculum that you teach in your studio. It is simply a wake-up call for school owners to know WHY they teach the curriculum that they teach. The "I teach this curriculum because these are the forms/moves/drills that have always been taught in my style" excuse doesn't hold water. Because quite simply, it's not true. For example, thousands of TaeKwonDo schools teach the "traditional" forms that were created in the 1960s. That doesn't qualify as "Traditional" or "the way it has always been done". It is just what YOU have always done. I'm not saying that you have to change your forms (necessarily). When you step back and look practically at your curriculum, what is the art itself and what are the vehicles designed to deliver the art to your students. I will use forms as an example.... The ART of Karate is taught through the VEHICLE of katas. If the art is Karate, and the vehicle is katas, can the vehicle be updated? Do you still drive a car from the 1900s? I didn't think so. "Selling out" shouldn't be your main concern; remaining relevant and innovative in today's world should be... OK so on to your curriculum. Because this is going to hundreds of martial arts schools with dozens of styles and sub styles this will of course vary based on each studio. I will briefly explain out our curriculum and the rational behind it. I have included my e-mail at the bottom if you would like more information:



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Forms: Hybrid forms were created to be a relevant vehicle to deliver martial arts to our students. They incorporate drillable combinations that can be used to teach sparring, board breaking and self-defense, however, still look like a martial arts form. They are broken down into different advancement levels so that students of all ranks can learn rank appropriate moves and still keep the pattern challenging for higher ranking students. The forms are beautiful and impressive when performed well, but more importantly when a student asks what a move does or how it can be applied, we have good solid reasons because they were designed to be relevant to today's modern warrior!

Tactical Skills: Many schools teach 1 Steps and Tactical Skills are just an innovation based on 1 Steps. Beginners are required to learn 3-4 Tactical Skills that they perform with a partner. "Back in the day" we would step back into a front stance, cross our arms and perform a low block with a yell. The other partner would then yell while standing in a ready stance. The 1st partner would then step forward and execute a high level punch at which point partner 2 would do one of 4-5 1 Steps. It was the way it was... Tactical Skills take it to the next level. In Tac Skills, both partners start in a fighting/sparring stance with hands in guard. The partner doing the Tac Skill either says "Punch Attack", "Grab Attack" or "Kick Attack" (depending on which skill they are showing) and the attacking partner throws the appropriate attack. This is a much simpler and more effective when teaching students of all ages. The Tactical Skills are either sparring combos to prepare them for the next level when they will begin sparring, or self-defense from a grab.

Sparring: Sparring is a key element to teaching solid martial artists how to become warriors. This element, however, is not being utilized correctly in many schools. Sparring should always be done with safety 1st. Of course, high level athletes may have higher contact, however, when there are spectators or beginners watching, sparring must be controlled in order to attract all adults and not just the select few who love "hard sparring". If you want to build an amazing program, use sparring to build community and camaraderie. Be careful not to breed an alpha dog atmosphere. We teach and mainly practice Free Sparring. Free sparring focuses on building combinations, blocking and counter attacks. We also teach point sparring, ground sparring, street sparring and many other variations.

Board Breaking: I love Monopoly. I used to play it for hours as a kid and teen... But after a while, it got boring and redundant. I have never felt that way when smashing through a board! If you do 1 thing from this article, try this: Break out

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some plastic boards in your beginners class and have them do a front kick on a 1 board color lower than their age. See the response you get. From White Belt, our students are learning how to break and every once and a while, we let them hit a board. Not too often, but enough so that they always love to break. If board breaking just a testing requirement, it can become a fear based obstacle and not a motivational tool. Once our students get Orange Belt, they get a stripe for doing breaking techniques on a bag or target. They only earn the stripe for doing the move in a way that would have broken a board had there been a board there. At Blue Belt (roughly 8 months after Orange), breaking becomes a requirement for testing. Our students have a different mindset about it than they used to... They can't wait! And the higher ranks continue to WANT to challenge themselves instead of being afraid of future challenges.

Leadership: Our students know that leadership is a huge part of being a martial artist. This part of the curriculum is a take home mission sheet similar to the image on the right. There are 20 missions ranging from "practice your form at home once a week" to "introduce yourself to someone you don't know at school/work/martial arts". Students are encouraged to do as many as they can and earn a stripe for turning it in and stars on their next belt based on how many missions they completed. We then use the paper for mat chats and for parent feedback.



2. Organization:

How does it "feel" in your class as a student? as an instructor? as a parent? as a potential client who just walks in of the street while you are teaching a class? Being (or at least looking) organized makes others feel comfortable. Consistency in how things are done and the experience that people have in your school is huge in student and parent retention. Here are 3 areas to make sure to be organized:

-Class Planner: We all CAN teach a class by "winging it", but we also CAN take 5 minutes and plan a lesson out. Our curriculum is laid out in a way that may even take less time, but the point is that, no matter how senior of a rank you are, you should have a written/typed out lesson planner for your classes. When you teach with a planner, you run a smoother class and your direct reports

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as well as your students can tell that you are running the class based on a plan. There is comfort in a plan. You can always add something in or change things around, but this at least creates a solid start to a great class. To those of you with a staff, they will if you do. Also, your staff can easily take over a class or start one off the way you would if you hand them your planner and let them know what to do.

-Lobby: If you are a 1 man show, you should have an easy-to-grab program information as well as a small form to collect info from a potential client who comes in while you are teaching. You can escape the floor, introduce yourself and hand them the sheet for them to fill out so that you can contact them later. Free stuff is always cool too.... Have some pens made, key chains, t-shirts, whatever... Thank them for coming in, show them where to place the info sheet when they complete it, and give them a freebee. Also, have a system for parents to get help if needed. A clipboard on the front counter with a sheet (like a check in sheet at the doctor) would work great. As class gets ready to start, tell the lobby that if they need anything (sign up for an event, but a shirt, etc.) that they can write out their name and what they need or what their question is. In the time after that class and before the next one, you can take the sheet and go in order to serve your clients easily and professionally. If you have credit cards on file, this is very easy. Just have a check box for them to check if they want to charge their card on file for purchases and events. If you have a staff, make sure that they know all of the current specials and have everything they need to do their jobs well. This includes printed materials and cleaning products. Regardless of the size of your staff, your lobby should be a comfortable place where parents can build and maintain relationships with each other.

-Restrooms: Yes restrooms. You never want a client to have to ask for toilet paper, soap or paper towels. This, while seems silly, is the reason that many schools look unprofessional. Fully stocked, clean, and good smelling bathrooms are a key to looking more organized.

3. Relationships:

I'll be brief here because this is a simple concept. No one cares what rank you are or how good you are at martial arts. They will keep coming back to your classes because they like you! Now take that a step further. They will keep going past black belt because they like each other! You have to be intentional about building drills and activities into classes where students can meet, work together and bond. I always encourage them to get with a new partner and do

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something quick to break the ice. This could be a silly conditioning drill or a challenging pad drill. Encourage positive relationships because they are the CORE of your studio growth!

4. Excellence:

Kyoshi Dave Kovar has it drilled into my head that “We never teach good classes, only GREAT classes”. Excellence is in details like starting and ending on time, doing a mat chat that is engaging, walking through your lobby between classes to say hello parents, looking energetic (even through the last class of the night), and even just making sure that the stripe on the student’s belts are straight and clean looking. Excellence is a mindset. Some school owners out there have a “mom and pop” mindset. I’m not saying that this is terrible, but this mindset will limit your potential without you even knowing it. When excellence is your mindset, you won’t stand for certain things in your school. It will bother you when there are lightbulbs out, when there’s a hole in the wall, when the thumb tacks are all different colors, when the walls look dirty. The excellence mindset will take you to the next level because you will see your studio as a real company who provides top notch service to their clients while keeping the personal touch of the “mom and pop shop”. So in the words of Bill and Ted, “Be Excellent”!



We would love to help your school get to the next level.
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