

LEADERSHIP AND THE MARTIAL ARTS

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For over 200 years, the United States Marine Corps has exemplified the finest in military virtue. Its success in battle is unmatched and the credit for this success can be summed up in one word: Leadership.

What truly sets Marines apart from all the others is leadership. Leadership is encouraged from the moment a young man or woman enters boot camp, and is emphasized throughout their career. Leadership applies to all areas including yourself, in that a strong part of leadership is self-discipline and performing to the very best of your capabilities whether you are under direct supervision or not.

Leadership is not simply bossing around others, but is a selfless giving of yourself to guide and direct the activities of others or a group.

The Marine Corps has established a set of guidelines called Leadership Principles, which help leaders in their day to day contact with their subordinates.

The Marine Corps Leadership Principles are:

- **Know yourself and seek self-improvement.**
- **Be technically and tactically proficient.**
- **Develop a sense of responsibility among your subordinates.**
- **Make sound and timely decisions.**
- **Set the example.**
- **Know your Marines and look out for their welfare.**
- **Keep your Marines informed.**
- **Seek responsibility and take responsibility for your actions.**
- **Ensure assigned tasks are understood, supervised, and accomplished.**
- **Train your Marines as a team.**
- **Employ your command in accordance with its capabilities.**

As Martial Art Instructors, we have unique challenges in our responsibilities toward our students. It is no longer enough that we are proficient in kicking, punching, throwing and twisting joints. These days, Instructors must be good leaders and mentors to our students, and guide them in their Martial Arts development. The goal of every instructor should be to produce students that can carry on the traditions of their system and their legacy. However, today we are faced with young students who are often without a "father-figure" in their home, or lack a proper role model. Morality and self-discipline are only words that they have rarely heard, and likely do not know the meaning of.

The Instructor's Leadership and the Mentorship they provide may be the only thing that separates a child who may someday be a success and one that will continue to fill our prisons.

I believe that the very same Leadership Principles can be applied to Instructors of the Martial Arts by changing a few words around to fit our unique circumstances. By applying these principles to your day to day interaction, you will benefit yourself, your students, and the Martial Arts as a whole.

Know yourself and seek self-improvement.

When does learning in the Martial Arts end? If we are wise, then we never stop learning both our Art, and other things that supplement it.

Instructors should always seek to constantly improve themselves and through self-awareness recognize their own strengths, weaknesses, assets, and limitations. Recognize your strengths and assets and exploit them. Find your weakness and limitations and conquer them.

Be technically and tactically proficient.

Technical excellence is paramount for an instructor. Constantly practicing to maintain and improve your skills is a part of the never-ending journey that is the Martial Arts.

Again, this applies directly to the paragraph above. Seeking self-improvement sets the example for your students.

If a student asks something you don't know, don't "BS" them. Tell them you are not certain of the correct answer, and immediately seek to learn the correct answer. When you have the answer, get back to your student. Student's know when they are being fooled, just don't open your mouth and be the fool.

Develop a sense of responsibility among your students.

Train your students to accept responsibility for themselves and their actions. Teach them that all actions have consequences, and that the skills they learn in the dojo should carry them in all aspects of their lives, from school to the workforce.

Teach them that their responsibility is to themselves, to the dojo, and to society and that their actions will reflect either positively or negatively to all of the above.

Make sound and timely decisions.

Indecision has destroyed the morale of more armies than just about any other factor. When a decision is called for, consider your options, use your best judgement and make the decision.

Leaders are decisive. Great leaders through history have made decisions, and even if that decision was incorrect, they took responsibility for it. Today, in an attempt to avoid the taking of responsibility and making the tough decisions, many have embraced the numerous management fads like Total Quality Management in which decisions are reached by consensus. Unfortunately, leadership doesn't work by committee, but with one lone person at the top who has accepted the responsibility of leadership.

As a leader you must take charge of yourself, the situation, and make the tough decisions and live with the consequences of that decision.

Set the example.

As a leader, you are the person students look to for advice and approval. Students will follow the example that is set for them by those that they respect.

You must constantly set the example through your actions and deeds. Students will immediately be put off by the "Do as I say, but not as I do" mentality.

Nearly every aspect of your life is likely to be scrutinized by those that you lead. Your personal morality, your personal convictions, and personal habits are open to inspection by others. Your corrections and advice are more likely to be followed if you are not guilty of those very same things you are trying to help your students with.

Know your Students and look out for their welfare.

How well do you really know your students? If you have a large number of students, maybe not very well. A large number of students will definitely affect how closely you get to know your students, but you should always make the attempt to learn all you can about them.

How many students come from a broken home and have no real role models in their lives? How about the kid who is the target for bullies at school or is very shy? How are they doing in school and are they making good grades? Giving personalized and special attention to students goes a long way in shaping their lives and showing them that they are more than just a monthly fee.

Supportive counseling of your students is another important factor for the leader. Students often get lost in the shuffle and rarely receive real feedback from the instructors. A student's personal and martial arts development is a part of looking out for their welfare. Students need to receive periodic counseling so they know where they stand on their next promotion, and where their strengths and their weaknesses are. Set goals for them. Give them options for correcting their deficiencies, start them on a program toward improvement and be supportive of their efforts. Give them updates as they progress, praising them when they do well and quickly correct them when they stray.

Keep your Students informed.

Let your students know what is going on in the dojo, what events are on the horizon and let them know what goals you have set for the dojo in the coming months and years. Let them know they are part of the dojo and how they can help in achieving those goals. Make them feel like a contributing part of the dojo's success and future.

Keeping the student informed of their progress goes right back to the previous section about counseling. Establish a program of periodic counseling for the dojo and let every student know exactly where he or she stands with regards to promotions, and their martial arts development. Implementing such a program will be difficult, but the benefits gained will be immeasurable.

Seek responsibility and take responsibility for your actions.

At the same time we are working to develop a sense of responsibility in our students, Instructors need to demonstrate responsibility to their students through their actions. Little things like keeping your word, not making excuses and willingness to accept responsibility when things don't go quite right, sets the example.

Instructors should always seek additional responsibility rather than remaining content with their current status. Volunteer in local community and charitable organizations. Ask for more responsibility in organizations you belong to (like the USJJF), and step up at every opportunity to help. Take the initiative and assume leadership wherever you can, and if subordinate to another, give that person your very best efforts and your loyalty.

Ensure assigned tasks are understood, supervised, and accomplished.

This might be a little tougher to apply, since our students are not our employees or a squad of Marines. However, as instructors we often assign tasks to our students, from dojo clean up days, organizing a function or special event, helping in the day to day running of the dojo, or performing a certain technique during class.

When giving instructions, make sure they are clearly understood and offer clarification if necessary. Supervise tasks, while staying out of the way, (rather than going back to the dojo office to relax), and make sure the task is completed.

Employ your leadership in accordance with its capabilities.

Teach what you know and don't assume that because of your high ranking in one martial art that you are qualified to teach another.

The wide ranges of Martial Arts all have unique capabilities and different emphasis on how techniques are performed. Train your students in the essence of your art, and to expand their horizons, invite special guest instructors to conduct classes or seminars at your dojo. Even if that guest instructor is your technical junior, they are the expert in their art. Take advantage of the opportunity to expand your knowledge, and that of your students. As USJJF members, we have a unique opportunity in having many skilled instructors from many different arts under the same big tent. Take advantage of this and everyone will benefit.

A last word about Mentorship before I close. Your students, particularly the youngest of them, are a perfect opportunity for you as their instructor to radically affect the outcome of their lives. You are a leader and as such, it is also your responsibility to be a mentor. If you cannot accept that responsibility, then perhaps a reexamination of your motivations are in order.

Although many look to the Martial Arts for their livelihood, this does not mean that students should be looked upon as merely a source of revenue. Students study the Martial Arts for a variety of reasons. Anyone can teach another person to kick, punch and fight. It takes a Sensei to develop a Martial Artist. Since the Martial Arts are meant to enhance all aspects of a student's life, development of the student's personal character is the foremost goal for an instructor. Don't be afraid to take students under your wing and give them needed guidance. Be the example they follow and the person they want to emulate. Your students are your future, give them the attention and leadership they deserve.