

Loyalty and Taekwon-Do

Vince Pygott, Oct 2013.

Introduction

Many people view loyalty as being very simple but it is in fact complex. Loyalty has a number of functions; on a personal level, within a group or community and within society at large. Loyalty can also be multi-dimensional because you can be loyal to many things or concepts all at the same time. Examining how loyalty can be developed or fostered within the context of International Taekwon-Do could help decision makers to develop effective strategies to growing the organisation.

Function of Loyalty

Loyalty is an aspect of a person's behaviour and as such is controlled by both genetics and environmental influences. An individual's genetic make-up, their genome, we have no control over; but it will determine the underlying template onto which someone's loyalty is built. Because of this there is going to be variation in the loyalty displayed by individuals. Some individuals will never form loyalties, other individuals will be extremely loyal to everything and every ideal; both types of individual will be a very small minority of the population. Most individuals will have varying degrees of loyalty to varying aspects of their life and this is naturally going to be true for those individuals who decide to learn Taekwon-Do.

Humans are social animals, living in social groups and depending on each other for their survival. In this context, being loyal to your group, your kin (those most closely related to you), improves your chances of survival; and any behaviour that improves your chances of survival gets passed on to your offspring. The individuals who display loyalty toward each other are more likely to survive than those who are not loyal.

Loyalty like most human behaviours is complex, not just the result of innate behaviours (which are wholly determined by genetics). Because loyalty is a complex behaviour it will have environmental influences and as such becomes a learned behaviour, or in some cases an unlearned behaviour. Being a learned behaviour means that your life experiences will shape your loyalty or should I say loyalties.

At one time humans were scavengers, living in small troupes. You were loyal to the members of your troupe, you stayed with them, shared food found with them, cared for and looked after the infants, protected each other from predators. You learnt how to care, how to scavenge, how to share, the consequences of not sharing, not protecting each other. So loyalty developed the bond between individuals within the troupe.

Today we live in a very complex society, containing many different groups, we can belong to: our family, extended family, we can also belong to our friends, our school, our church, our place of work, commercial entities (e.g. bank, insurance company), a nation, or various different hobby, recreational or sporting organisations; in our case International Taekwon-Do. As well as actual groups we can also associate ourselves with concepts such as: a political ideology, a religion (as separate from a church), a culture (ethnic or otherwise e.g. pop culture).

Underpinning all of this is still our need to form bonds with other individuals either directly by joining a group, or indirectly by belonging to a concept; to validate our convictions, to make us feel good about ourselves. Because of this we develop loyalties to one group or another, or concepts. However, unlike early humans, modern humans are not constantly under threat of dying; this means that the loyalties we develop can be of differing levels of commitment but there must always be a reason to develop a loyalty. The individual must get something out of being loyal, some kind of benefit.

Aspects of Loyalty

In terms of Taekwon-Do and in particular International Taekwon-Do, you can be loyal to many different aspects of Taekwon-Do. You can be loyal to yourself in regards to your own training and your own behaviour or philosophy; or you can be loyal to your instructor, your club, your region, to the organisation (International

Taekwon-Do) itself, to the international body International Taekwon-Do Federation, to the founder General Choi Hong Hi, or you can be loyal to the Chang Hon style of Taekwon-Do.

As mentioned earlier there are different degrees of loyalty. Consider what your level of loyalty is to each of the different groups or aspects of Taekwon-Do. Where does your loyalty to Taekwon-Do stand? What aspect of Taekwon-Do are you loyal to? Why are you loyal to a particular aspect of Taekwon-Do?

People do not usually ask themselves these questions. We do not normally ask ourselves why we are loyal to someone or something. We simply act according to some internal feeling or moral compass. George P. Fletcher, Cardozo Professor of Jurisprudence at Columbia University, indicates that there are 3 dimensions of Loyalty. The first is love, the giving and receiving of love, this is the kind of loyalty reserved for family and friends. The second is 'identity of self', being a member of a group develops self-worth and a sense of belonging. The third is spiritual well-being; Professor Fletcher talks about loyalty to gods or god but this can be extrapolated to any code of living or way of life that makes you feel good about yourself. You can use these as a guide to developing your reasons for your loyalty.

From this we can be aware that there are different motivations for their various loyalties. Each aspect of your loyalty to Taekwon-Do will not be born out of the same motivation. This will lead to the different loyalties having different priorities or levels of importance. Simon Keller, *The Limits of Loyalty* says "There are many ways in which loyalties differ ... one kind of loyalty is good, dangerous, permissible, obligatory ...". To further understand your loyalties toward Taekwon-Do investigate your motivations, your priorities. While you do this let us not forget that apart from your involvement in Taekwon-Do, you will definitely have many other loyalties in your life and they will all have differing degrees of importance to you also. For example your loyalty towards a product probably only exists for as long as the product remains better than any other product and will be of low importance, where as your loyalty towards a family member is most likely going to be much stronger and you will remain even in those instances when they may have erred. Other examples could be supporting your club or region during a tournament, through thick and thin, or retaining your membership to International Taekwon-Do, or putting your own personal safety on the line for someone or something else.

Developing Loyalty

For an organisation like International Taekwon-Do to understand how to retain members the decision makers within the organisation need to understand what it is the members of the organisation are loyal to and why they are loyal to a particular aspect of Taekwon-Do? The decision makers need to ask questions about loyalty. [Within International Taekwon-Do the decision makers would be the instructors, the members of an advisor group or the advisory panel, the CEO and OE, and the Board of Directors.]

Do people stay in the organisation because of their instructor, i.e. s/he is charismatic, an excellent role model, does a lot for the members? Do they stay because the International Taekwon-Do provides good quality services, services that are good value for money, has a well-respected brand? Do they stay with the organisation because they want to continue to practice the Chang Hon style of Taekwon-Do, or be a part of Master Trajtenberg's International Taekwon-Do Federation?

Businesses understand that loyalty is integral to any organisation's success. There is a plethora of information on the internet about how important loyalty is and how to get loyalty from their customers. Vivian Giang, a journalist for Business Insider, says, "Loyalty is why employees stick it out even if they have other options. It is what makes people feel that they are a part of something great." International Taekwon-Do, while not a business, is an organisation that is reliant on loyalty and as there are so many aspects where loyalty can be achieved or lost, it is up to the decision makers within the organisation to foster loyalty within the membership.

So what does International Taekwon-Do have to do to gain the loyalty of its members? As mentioned earlier, loyalty is a learned behaviour and in Taekwon-Do, as in all martial arts, loyalty is a main value that is taught or implied by the instructors. To back this up it states in the International Taekwon-Do Theory

Handbook and General Choi's encyclopaedia as part of the Student / Instructor Relationship that a student should, "Always be loyal and never criticise your instructor, Taekwon-Do or the teaching methods."

How is loyalty learnt? Loyalty has to be learnt as a result of exposure to your environment. It is not learnt in a vacuum but as part of a person's past and present experiences. Loyalty is a behaviour developed over time based on the interactions between people. People need to have positive experiences in order to develop loyalty, either towards their instructor or the organisation. All the experiences of the individual while training in Taekwon-Do have to align with the person's current value or belief system of the person. Taekwon-Do has to become something that is important to the person in order for them to develop a lasting loyalty. The key word here is 'lasting', because a person will be loyal for as long as training in Taekwon-Do is important to them. As soon as something degrades their loyalty in their training or the instructor or the organisation they may very well stop training and their loyalty will have been lost.

As an aside it may be that the younger the person is when they start training, the more loyalty you may potentially develop in them, because they are developing their experiences while training. If the training is also developing a moral code then that should further increase that person's loyalty towards the instructor and potentially International Taekwon-Do.

So what can be done to develop loyalty? Deepak Chopra a doctor, motivational speaker, and founder of the Chopra Foundation, mentions a number of ways that can help build loyalty. They are:

1. Abstain from disloyalty (don't gossip or spread rumours)
2. Work on bonding and cooperation (by being open and sympathetic, support projects that are good for everyone so the whole team can win)
3. Honour the differences between rivals and competitors (rivalry is hostile, competition is healthy)
4. Pay attention to personal details (care for people, understand them, be alert to their needs, make an effort to be inclusive, accept everyone's ideas)
5. Share your success (praise, appreciate, reward the members for the successes of the school or organisation)
6. Do not keep secrets (make the decision-making process transparent, share financial details this can provide an incentive to the members to help in times of difficulty)
7. Be humble, remind yourself every day that there is no "I" with "we" (provide a community to get through crises with)

These ideas can be implemented at any level within the International Taekwon-Do and should be implemented at every level within International Taekwon-Do. As with all good systems it must start at the top and filter down.

Considerations

Understanding that loyalty is a complex aspect of a person's behaviour, in young members loyalty has to be learnt, while in older members loyalty has to be earned. In either case being loyal has to provide a benefit to the person. The organisation would do well to understand where its members' loyalties lie. Find out what aspects of Taekwon-Do are more important to its members remembering that making them a part of a 'family' will gain the greatest amount of loyalty. The more the member is invested in Taekwon-Do the more loyal they will be.

To some members Taekwon-Do will be no more than a commodity. Their loyalty will be as it is for any other branded product. International Taekwon-Do will need to make sure it supplies great services that this type of individual can 'buy' into. Aside from the consumer or along-side them, the task of the decision makers in International Taekwon-Do will need to be to promote attitudes and practices that will develop loyalty in the people they deal with. Following methods such as those suggested by Deepak Chopra may prove valuable to the organisation. If the methods are instigated well and they filter down to all the instructors then greater loyalty within the membership may be developed.

Summary

Because the reasons and degree of loyalty are complex there needs to be a purpose for fostering loyalty towards International Taekwon-Do. To do this the decision makers need to consider the many aspects of loyalty. They need to find out why existing students are loyal and then apply that knowledge to retaining them as well as attracting new members. The desired result of developing loyalty amongst the membership is to have members who are fully invested, so that they have a sense of belonging and will remain loyal to International Taekwon-Do and the ideals it embodies. This will ultimately mean that the organisation will endure, grow and prosper, allowing International Taekwon-Do to spread the values it offers to more and more people.

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