

Joy Mackenzie
Black Belt Essay

Giving back in your own way.

Giving back when you do not like teaching large groups is difficult to navigate but can be done. It is important to give back to your club, when you have received so much help along your way to a black belt. Teaching does not come naturally to me so instructing large groups as a way to give back is not a good fit. I have found other ways to give back to my club and help others on their journey. I hope I can inspire others to think outside the box and work to their strengths when giving back to Taekwon-Do.

Instructing is not a good fit for me because I have a phobia of public speaking. I have never been confident in front of a room, and can sometimes feel sick to my stomach. I have faced this fear and have led classes and trainings in the past despite the sometimes overwhelming anxiety. But when given the option I would rather not do so. It took me a long time to speak to my instructors about this as I was very keen to give back in the same way as others do. I travel for work and sometimes I have avoided visiting other clubs as the expectation as a black belt is that you will be asked to instruct. I would rather be at the back of the class helping people one on one with protocol or giving out advice than lead from the front of class. I do what I can within my comfort zone but I realised I would be much more effective if I gave back in other ways.

It is important to give back because so many instructors, seniors and other club affiliates have been instrumental in my journey to becoming a black belt. I can thank them for this by helping them in return and others who are on the same track. Becoming a member of the ITF Taekwon-Do whanau has been life changing and I want to support other people within our community. Master Rounthwaite VIIIth dan and Mrs Rounthwaite Vth dan welcomed me to RTR as a blue belt from another organisation, it was a revelation to be introduced to such a great culture and appreciation of Taekwon-Do and how it can improve not just your skill but your life. Master and Mrs R give selflessly and completely to the Do and support my aspirations. They are leaders both within class and the wider organisation and have embraced me as an important part of their club and culture. They have supported me through the ups and downs that life has given me over the last 5 years. The RTR senior students, even though many are younger than me by quite a few years, have supported me by giving up their time to teach me and train with me for many hours outside of class.

I have played sport throughout my life but could no longer be an active part of those teams. I played club and representative rugby for 20 years but when I retired from playing, the only roles remaining for me within the club were non participating roles such as coaching. I felt that once I was not match fit, I was not a part of the team. My fitness started to suffer as soon as I gave up the sport. Taekwon-Do has let me be a competitor into my 50s. I feel as strong and fit now as I did when I was 30 and playing rugby. Taekwon-Do is very supportive of me as an older athlete. While I think many aspects of the art are ageless, there are some things that

you simply cannot do as you age. But in no way has my age affected my inclusion in all events and trainings.

The culture of Taekwon-Do has been amazing and has helped me not just achieve as a competitor but improved my social life as well. I have formed lifelong friendships within my club, the wider Taekwon-Do community and their families. I have found that including the families of our students in some social activities has led to better outcomes for the students as well as occasionally leading a parent to join the club. I know many other retired sports people struggle to find a welcoming place and I like that I can inspire them to give it a try.

I have given back to my club in many other ways where I do not have to get up and speak in front of a large group. One of those ways is taking over ordering merchandise for RTR. I take orders, receive payments, receive goods and distribute goods. I took this over in 2016 and have had ongoing relationships with the suppliers and printers. I think that it is an important role as having club gear makes you feel instantly a part of the team. I also think that looking good when you are travelling around the country representing RTR gives you a sense of pride.

My biggest strength lies in motivating others, I do this by training with unbridled enthusiasm. People who train with me get pushed to their limits and out do their own expectations. I feel partially responsible for the high scores of many planks in gradings from our club members as I have made planks a standard practice in many situations including airports around the world. I lead by example and train as hard as I can every time I train. I have been told I have inspired others who were not sure they could do things to try and eventually to achieve. As a mature practitioner I have had to adapt and focus on how to realistically meet the requirements on occasion. For example, I might lower the height of a break but increase the number of boards. This can do attitude has inspired many other mature practitioners in my club to experiment with different variations and find their strengths.

I do not enjoy teaching classes, however, one on one or in a small group I can thrive. I have taught and trained with a number of upcoming seniors in my club. For example I have had many lunchtime breaking sessions at my home with an open invite to seniors who need help. I specialise in breaking and step sparring and like to work together with other seniors students to reach our goals. I also created a facebook group for coordinating trainings, the group has grown significantly and use it regularly. I posted my training sessions on this group, open to any and all who wished to partake, usually at a local park. These sessions were well attended and helped focus on areas of improvement. This small group environment is much better for me and allows me to interact and be more help to other seniors. I lead by example and show my commitment to the training on this forum. I also attend as many extra classes and trainings as I can to support Master R including attending additional trainings he hosts in other regions.

I offer mentoring where I can. For example, a young member of our club who became complacent in his training. He is very skilled but needs that extra push to reach his blackbelt goals. We train together and I offer advice on what areas to work on; including his self-belief. I believe mindset is one of the biggest hurdles to reaching your blackbelt and I work hard to make sure that our upcoming students work on their mental and well as physical preparation.

I am a sounding board for young students and parents who find me more approachable on small issues rather than taking everything to Master and Mrs R. I can then advise them that they need to speak to the R's directly or be an intermediary when required. Although I don't have much experience teaching younger people, I have formed some friendships with the younger seniors that allow them to speak to me when non Taekwon-Do issues affect their training.

I organise the logistics of travel to competitions, liaising with others to fit people in cars and accommodation. I also bring a lot of enthusiasm to these road trips that make them more appealing to the wider club. I also organise social get togethers to allow us to learn more about each other - other than their skills on the floor. This has led to many more informal trainings and mentoring. I have also formed a solid relationship with the Central Regions Manager and have become the unofficial RTR liaison on regional matters.

I helped lead a fundraising effort to get a team to the ITF World Cup in Sydney in 2018. I went to the world cup as a competitor but our team coach didn't make it due to a last minute complication. I stepped up as leader, second and coach; supporting our team to some impressive results. We also raised several thousand dollars towards the Slovenia World Cup before it was postponed. I ran two successful quiz nights at a local establishment with support from the fundraising committee. We also ran a scary movie night at a local funeral home which was an interesting experience for all.

While I do not enjoy getting up in front of the class, I have been known to be the disciplinarian when required. I enjoy dishing out exercise based punishments while leaving the person leading the class as the good guy.

Another example of how I can be more effective when not leading the class is with a new member of our club. He came to our club with little knowledge about what was expected of him in the RTR dojang setting. I was able to work with him one on one and help him understand the technical aspects of the training as well as the level of respect required of everyone.

Giving back when you do not like teaching large groups is difficult to navigate but can be done. Different people thrive in different environments both as teacher and student. It is important for me to give back as Taekwon-Do has given so much to me. My mindset about sport and life has changed over the last eight years. Working towards my blackbelt was an especially life changing experience. I have found other ways to give back to my club in smaller groups and one on one; as well as being a technical support for mature practitioners and leading by example. I believe Taekwon-Do has positive effects on your health and your life and I work to show that to others in the club. I hope I can inspire others to think outside the box and work to their strengths when giving back to Taekwon-Do. Walk your own line with good intentions and you will succeed.