

How does Taekwon-Do provide leadership qualities for youth?

What do you do in your club specifically to develop leadership and what ideas do you have to further develop leadership in your club or the organisation?

Brendan Doogan, September 2021

Introduction

We have a developing demographic crisis in Taekwon-Do. More specifically our instructorship is aging. This is both a major challenge, and a sign of past successes. Our seniors are staying, but young adults aren't being retained or recruited.

In 2007 a number of us went to work in South Korea, to bring Chang Hon Taekwon-Do back to its homeland. We quickly realised that taekwondo in South Korea is a childhood pastime, babysitting in essence. I was proud that we didn't have that approach here in New Zealand.

That has changed. Our membership is no longer predominately teen and adult martial artists, the majority are children. I have taught more than 9,000 children Taekwon-Do in the last five years and have reached the conclusion that Taekwon-Do is better for children than they are for the Art.

We must retain more members past childhood into their twenties and thirties, and must recruit more young adult beginners. If we do not fix this problem we will lose physical teaching ability as our instructors continue to age – who will teach flying, falling, sparring and breaking? Who will show the students exactly how a pattern, step sparring or self defence is meant to look? What will happen to our Art?

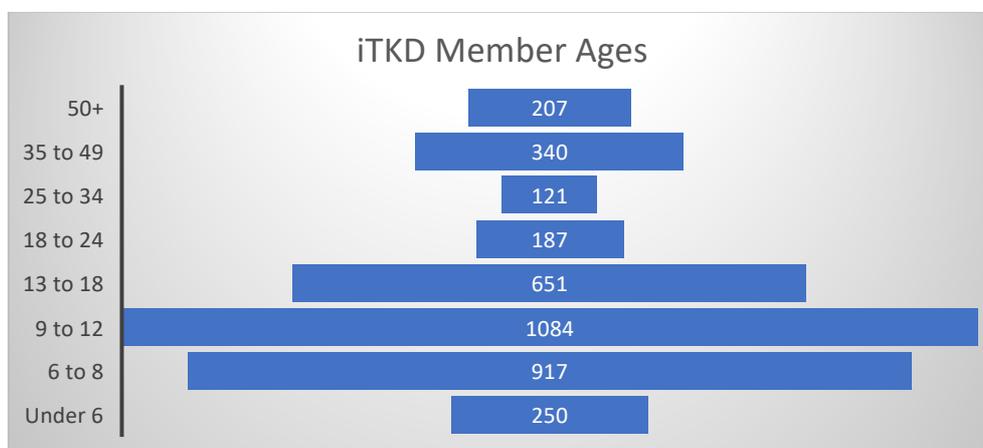


Figure 1. International Taekwon-Do membership as at 24/08/2021. Personal communication from Mr Shaun Tolley.

Below I present three sections to discuss the situation and share methods I use and proposals for improvement. The first section discusses the strengths of Chang Hon Taekwon-Do as a vehicle for developing leadership qualities in youth. Section two describes methods I use at my own club and when I'm teaching in general to foster leadership and prepare for my eventual replacement as a physical practitioner. Finally I suggest expectation, opportunity and esteem as paths to further develop leadership.

How does Taekwon-Do provide leadership qualities for youth?

Personal development

- Confidence
- Clarity of purpose
- Skill acquisition
- Public speaking

Taekwon-Do has a built-in ethos of personal development toward leadership. The encyclopedia is quite clear that black belts are expected to teach, and 4th dans and above are expected to spread the Art throughout the world. (Choi, 1983, pp. 87, volume 1)

Taekwon-Do creates confidence in the learner because things that were once difficult and impressive become easy and a matter of course – if I train diligently, I too can learn these techniques that amazed me as a white belt.

The Art is well constructed and has a solid internal logic. Its pieces mesh well with each other and the purpose and method of each technique and exercise is explicit and unobscured. There are no mysteries and the majority of questions have answers somewhere in the literature. A technique almost always has a definite application against an opponent. These qualities give the practitioner an appreciation for clear purpose in life.

There is always the possibility of improvement, and progress is so much more tangible than in other areas of life and learning. I see a new colour around my waist and get to participate in new exercises and stand closer to the front – these are concrete signs that I'm a successful learner. My qualifications aren't hidden at home in a frame on the wall, they're visible to everyone including myself. Classes are developmental – we are always finding new techniques, methods, approaches to consolidate previous learning and pick up new skills.

Many students including myself owe the Art gratitude for learning how to speak in front of a group. This crucial leadership skill is developed slowly but surely so one day the student realises that they can do public speaking despite initially being a shy person. Asking and answering questions in class, leading the count, sharing knowledge with a peer or junior, taking a warm up or section of the lesson, all of these lead in a quiet way to becoming an Instructor.

Professional development

- Culture of learning
- Frequent opportunities to upgrade
- Built in progression in skill
- Built in progression in qualifications
- Modelling by seniors and elders

The entire Art is predicated around learning, in physical, ethical and knowledge modes. In fact, it is unusual to go to a class without expecting to learn something, at the very least a small reminder about something you haven't worked on for a while. Courses, camps and seminars are available to members at different levels and with various focuses, and there are handbooks, websites, encyclopedias, apps and quizzes for furthering one's knowledge.

Our skills are continually developed and there are frequent opportunities to earn new qualifications in both rank and knowledge. We attend International Instructor Courses and International Umpire Courses every two years and have annual Instructor Update Courses. Our senior members lead by example, sharing new things they've learned and encouraging the membership to do the same.

The demonstration habit

- Progress is publicly tested
- Praise and tacit empowerment by being asked to lead, teach, demonstrate in class

We perform. Our seniors, peers and juniors see us in action every night at club. We grade publicly in front of our examiners, Instructors, clubmates and supporters. We compete in front of audiences. Our progress is accountable to ourselves and the others around us. We walk the talk.

We know our seniors trust us and believe in us when they ask us to share something we're doing well in class, or to lead a small exercise or warm up.

What I do to develop leadership

Micro-leadership

- Counting
- Warm-ups
- Game leadership
- Demonstrating
- Asking and answering questions publically
- Skits
- Checking uniforms
- Teaching someone something

- Referring to and addressing seniors / whomever is leading as Miss X, Mr Y
- Setting up and packing away
- Looking after guests and triallers
- Posture – everyone stands well, so they're seen well
- Classmates, not siblings
- Seniors spotlighted for juniors to emulate in Zoom classes
- Seniors get to do more stuff; reward for rank.

These are methods I use in my teaching at my own club Dragon's Spirit Point Chevalier, and when teaching for other instructors, at camps and seminars, and while coaching.

All members take turns doing things like counting repetitions of exercises loud for the class, leading warm ups and games of their own design or choice. I also make sure that all members take turns demonstrating for the class, especially if they do something well, no matter how minor a thing it may be.

Questions are welcome in class and I make a point of either giving sufficient time that they feel they've been listened to and had their say, or that it's clear we'll come back to their query later. It's most important to do both, so that members feel they have some input to their own learning and that the instructor pays attention to their ideas and needs.

A sneaky method of helping students perform publically and show that they can self direct from time to time, is doing self defence or fight scene skits. Aside from thinking about how movements work together and flow one into another, they are free to be creative and in charge.

Senior members are empowered by being given the authority to walk down their columns and check clubmates' uniforms, and coach the juniors on things like tying the belt correctly.

Similarly, senior members of all ages are delegated the responsibility to teach someone something. They may be a white belt showing a beginner how to punch, or a black stripe teaching a junior pattern. In both cases the teaching member is explicitly supported by my own role as Instructor. This is done by saying in front of the group how knowledgeable they are, and referring to them as Mr, Miss etc regardless of how young. This critical distinction is often missed by Instructors who refer to young but senior, or female teaching members by their first name. That is a subtle erosion of their authority, especially where other members are addressed correctly but they aren't.

Another way to help build leadership is to have students responsible to setting up and packing away. When they do a good job I'm constantly praising them and thanking them for it, as well as drawing attention to it if they forget to do it or I catch a senior doing it.

When guests or people on their first night arrive they're introduced to a member, maybe someone of a similar age, who looks after them that night. This lets the current member get a little teaching practice, and builds them up in the eyes of the beginner.

Members are coached on good posture when formed up and during formal exercises, but also when standing or sitting to listen or speak. Standing with chest out, shoulders back and limbs tidy has a positive effect on the student's own psychology, and conveys their authority as a martial artist and leader. During linework, patterns and prearranged modes of sparring we just look better and more martial when we stand tall and proud and represent our backgrounds, families, club and Art well.

When the inevitable sibling rivalry appears in club swift allocation of push ups helps children and teenagers understand that at training they aren't siblings – they're students training together. Where needed junior siblings are told off for disrespecting their sibling who is their senior in Taekwon-Do. Age doesn't come into it, a Taekwon-Do senior is a Taekwon-Do senior during class. If needed, students are encouraged to pair with someone else instead.

During Zoom classes it can be difficult to get instructions across to members, so senior members are praised and spotlighted for everyone to imitate. Once again this presents them to themselves and the class as leaders.

Finally, there is reward for rank. As odd as it may sound coming from myself, I'm not certain that all ranks should be allowed to compete in all events at tournaments. I feel that free sparring is something good to practice immediately on signing up, in a safe and constructive manner, but getting to compete in it should be a reward for reaching green belt or so. Ditto flying and breaking techniques, and prearranged free sparring. If everyone can do everything, what's special about being a green, blue, red or black belt?

For this reason there are things that only my senior students get to practice, in the senior-only class after the juniors have gone home. This includes things like throwing, falling, breaking, wrist locks and so on. This is a deliberately considered approach to tick several boxes at once. I want to keep these aspects of the Art alive, I want to practice them myself, my seniors deserve extra time, my seniors deserve to learn things that the juniors don't in recognition of their rank and loyalty.

Courses, camps, tournaments

- Encouraged to enter, praised for attending
- Made normal
- Prepared for

To help students build their confidence, experience and mana, I encourage them to attend events outside club and to visit other clubs. This year that has included things like not being allowed to grade unless they've competed in a tournament; three of my seniors regularly training at Master McPhail's Warrior club; participating in a club demonstration / have a go evening at a local school; travelling across the city to grade at Dragon's Spirit Papatoetoe; attending the Auckland North or National Kids' camps [TBC]; attending Mr Trotter's sparring syllabus seminar.

These are presented as normal things for a Taekwon-Do student to do, and we share our experiences and report back to the class about what it was like and things we enjoyed and learned.

Tournaments are explicitly and consciously prepared for. As a member of the Tournament Advisory Group I know how much better it is for all parties when this is done. For my members they get to practice things, try them out, and reflect on performance.

Attending events outside normal club nights thus gives students more confidence and an opportunity to lead by example, especially if they help others while doing so.

Pedagogical development

- “When you’re teaching”...
- “We’re doing this this way because...” / explaining tips and tricks for teaching
- “This isn’t really working so we’ll change it”
- Wander and watch those instructing, give visible approval [not always verbal]
- Steal their ideas – Chon-Ji is like saju jirugi [low blocks] followed by saju makgi [middle blocks]
- Use their words and phrases
- Personal relationship with each learner
- Say nice thinking, good remembering, nice kick, looking good, good power
- Storytime includes instructing tips from moral culture, for example Ideal Instructor, Philosophy of Taekwon-Do
- Reflective teaching questions

These are some of the tactics I use to help my learners become teachers, with the goal that they’ll one day surpass and replace me. I very much fear not replacing myself, my knowledge, skill and ethics in the Art, and so I openly explain why I’m teaching things a certain way, as I teach them. I truly hope that by the time I reach the end of my Taekwon-Do life I’ll have produced members better than myself in all aspects.

I present teaching as a natural and inevitable future for my members and praise their past and current instructing experience, no matter how small. I use phrases such as “When you’re teaching, you can...” to normalise the idea that they are perfectly capable of teaching and are expected to do so. Then I give them tips like practicing their own kicks or forging while watching a group do a pattern, or demonstrating techniques with their non-dominant side to get more practice in.

A really important teaching tip is to have a few good, solid methods for teaching each technique, especially the harder ones. I share this with my students or whomever I’m teaching at the time, for example with twisting kick. Not only do I teach them three different ways of learning or practicing the kick, but also how to teach it in those ways. The first method is sitting with the soles of the feet touching, knees bent. I ask the students to straighten one leg while keeping their little toe in contact with the floor, then repeat a number of times. Next

they repeat while holding the foot just off the floor, little toe still down. Then we transition to performing the kick standing. While all this is happening I explain that this is a good way for them to teach the kick because it's simple, gets straight to the root of the problem most people have – they don't have a mental / internal image to call on that matches the kick. Rather than teach the students as learners I teach them as teachers. This builds their ability to perform the kick themselves, but also puts them in the frame of mind of teaching others and normalises that as an expectation and possibility.

On the other hand, on occasion an exercise will for whatever reason not go well. I may overestimate the class' abilities, or it won't achieve the aim, or the group has run out of motivation and enjoyment. One of the most important lessons I've learned as an educator is when to stop. If an activity is not going well it is better to stop it, move on or try a different one and reflect on the situation later. Pushing ahead can be counter-productive. When this happens I say exactly why we're moving on: "Okay guys, I can see this isn't working, lets take a break / move on / try something else" or "We're going to move on to step sparring now because we need to get that done tonight".

The same rationale applies to saying aloud that I'm checking the time or lesson plan as I do so – because that's what an Instructor does when they're teaching and therefore the members know that that's what they can do when they're teaching too. It also has the positive effect of letting them know what's coming and that I'm taking their martial education seriously by keeping track of time and topic.

Next I make sure to visibly approve of their instructing. This can be verbal: "Nice exercise Ma'am", or just to be seen watching and nodding as they teach. It can be overt as well: "Wow, you guys are so lucky to have Miss Miller teaching you today, she's really good at this".

A cheeky method I use is to accuse myself of stealing their teaching ideas, or pretend (wink wink) that I came up with the idea myself. One night I referred to Dylan's method for remembering Chon-Ji tul for instance. He had noticed that the first half is similar to Saju Jirugi with its low blocks and the second half resembles Saju Makgi as it has middle blocks. So by using the 9th gup's prior knowledge of the order of exercises his method helps them keep the correct order of techniques in mind for their first pattern. Everybody wins with this approach – I get a new way of helping students, he feels pleased that I've remembered a good idea of his, the 9th gups get a "hack", and the class has a moment of humour. As Bruce Lee said, emotional content helps learning.

Similarly an Instructor can acknowledge their students' own agency by using the words and phrases they use. If a student conceives of low blocks as being chambered inside rather than on top, then it is a respect to them to use their way of saying it, at least for that moment. Outside Taekwon-Do classes for instance how many members use the phrase "pivot the supporting foot"? If they have a common language way of saying that it won't hurt, and will probably help to use that phrasing. It's likely that other students will understand that way of speaking too, so why not use it to help more people learn more quickly?

By this point it should be obvious that a personal relationship with each learner is fundamental. Knowing their strengths, experiences and interests helps them learn from you,

and gives them the sense of self-worth needed to lead others. If juniors see and hear you interacting positively, respectfully and in a developmental spirit with your senior students they will respond to them as leaders because that's how you've equipped and presented them. And as the General said, *"It is an instructor's responsibility to develop students outside as well as inside the do jang"*. (Choi, 1983, pp. p83, Volume 1)

In the same vein praising students for the positives in their Taekwon-Do generally and their instructing specifically can only empower our future leaders. Praise must be true, genuine and public. Corrections always need to be made, but not exclusively nor instead of acknowledging things done well. Criticism without praise is toxic. Hence saying things like "Nice kick / good power / I can see you've been working hard on that" is useful for the proximate need (the student's improvement) as well as our medium to long term need for new instructors.

Something I finish class with fairly often is storytime. I'm not quite sure how the idea sprouted but it has become a regular feature. Learning the exciting and weird stories behind the brief pattern meanings, making connections between different areas of Taekwon-Do language, sharing positive and negative experiences helps us all have a sense of community and greater attachment to the Art beyond just the punches and kicks. Recently I've shared the Sajeji Do / Student Instructor Relationship with my members in our Zoom classes. I've drawn special attention to the parts that talk about how to instruct and the qualities of a good Taekwon-Do leader. I've done this for my whole club's benefit, but moreso because I have two inherited 1st gups to prepare for their grading and beyond. This is another of the many seeds I plant to prepare them for both the idea of them instructing and some particulars on how its done.

A final example of pedagogical development of my future teaching members is to ask them why I've taught something a particular way, and for them to answer the same about their own teaching practice. Why did they choose to teach that, and why in that way? What worked, what didn't? I recently did the same for my colleagues at Dragon's Spirit Papatoetoe – "What's something you did tonight when you were instructing that you thought went really well, and that you'll keep on file to use again". The idea being that we must be responsive to our effectiveness and build a repertoire of solutions to the question of how things can be taught and learned.

In Te Ao Māori the intersection between kaiako (teacher) and ākonga (learner) is a recognition that learning is a shared experience and not necessarily one of unidirectional input. We share with one another so that all may benefit. For this reason I develop the students in front of me by teaching teaching.

Succession planning

- Instructorship as per all above
- Going further than the syllabus
- Black stripes have led class while I'm absent

All of the previous section stems from the desire to prepare excellent practitioners who can carry forward the techniques, knowledge and ethics of Taekwon-Do, in themselves and in others. Designed obsolescence as it were; my own.

Without repeating too much of what's already been said, a strong impression that I give students is that we, and soon they, must keep the Art alive in all its aspects. All members in my classes play with areas of Taekwon-Do that are not tested in either the grading syllabi or tournament events:

- Falling
- Flying
- Skits / prearranged
- Locks
- Throws and sweeps
- Knife self defence
- Reflex kicks
- Trick kicks
- Hollywood sparring [all safe techniques]

I remember my disappointment when having diligently prepared breakfalling for my red belt grading the examiner didn't ask to see it. That combined with having been hit by a van while cycling and escaping completely injury-free by doing a rolling side breakfall have impressed on me the need to keep this aspect of Taekwon-Do within our dojangs.

Some of the items above get practiced by all members as fun thing to play with a few times a year, and some are done more frequently by seniors only in their session after the main class ends. In both contexts I explain the utility of the exercises (athleticism, fun, could be useful someday) and that it's our duty to the General and his masters to pick up the baton and run with it. This leadership expectation to be guardians of the Art is explicit and I hope forms some of the teaching philosophy of our future instructors.

Having a venue for aspiring Taekwon-Doists to seek expertise outside the two usual main paths is also why I gave the Weird & Wonderful Taekwon-Do seminar series more than twenty times here and overseas between 2014 and 2019.

Ideas to further develop leadership

Tell them what to expect

Some of my family members live with Aspergers Spectrum Disorder, also known as Autism. New, unexpected situations can be difficult, distressing even. It can be very hard to figure out how to act, and what the expectations are, and why people behave differently toward us in new contexts.

We have a number of thresholds that members cross that put them in similar confusion and anxiety. We lose members because we don't prepare them with tools and an idea of what it'll be like when they transition to new roles and life stages.

Examples where we could be doing it better, and suggestions to ease through the change:

- First gups who're going to be expected to instruct – teach them teaching.
- Girls whose body shape is going to change as they grow into adulthood – encourage them to train through the changes and hear from women who've been through the change.
- Preteens who'll grow taller etc as they go through puberty – encourage them to keep up with the changing length of their limbs etc by doing basics often, and hearing from teens who've gone through it.
- New Zealand Team members who'll come back from champs to a vastly less intense existence, whether successful or not. Encourage them to plan for post-competitive life whether in or out of the Art.
- Women who may start families. Encourage them by the examples of mothers who've done it and either participated as they could, or returned later.
- Teen members who'll leave school and go on to study and work. What it's like, how Taekwon-Do can be a comforting constant during big life changes.
- Adult members as they age, how to continue to participate in new ways.
- Instructors who're aging and still need to teach; how to do that and prepare new teaching methods for when physically showing it oneself is less possible.
- Members whose ranks are about to change in big ways. Yellow stripes will get a pattern and step sparring; green belts will be tested on free sparring; blue belts will break and do 1 step sparring and flying; red belts will ramp up for a 2 day dan test; third dans will enter the expert class; sixth dans will enter the master class; eighth dans are approaching grandmastership.
- Everyone – dealing with injury and side stepping into other roles or modes until we are able to participate at the old level, and learning to accept participation at a new, lesser level.

At all of these thresholds our members balk or fade away. People delay the big gradings, for years in many cases. Competitors go back time and again because they don't know what else to do, or they leave the Art entirely. Moving for university, starting work and a family, beginning senior high school years, injury, not being physically capable of what we remember doing just a year or two ago, all of these see members move on.

I believe good leadership in the form of talking about the big transitions before they happen would help us retain many of these members for longer. And they, having been through the transition from young adult to parent, from girl/boy to grown-up, from Ngā Kaponga New Zealand Team member to umpire or club coach, can lead others through the same life changes.

Give them opportunities

- Demonstrations
- Umpiring
- Coaching
- Paid instructing
- Official performers

To transition members better, and retain leaders longer, they need to feel useful and have an explicit purpose in Taekwon-Do. Plenty are happy just to be a student forever, but that does not serve the Art nor International Taekwon-Do New Zealand. Being shoulder tapped to do a job has kept me stimulated and in the community.

If we want leaders, they must have something to lead. The breaking at class, colour belt self defence, fitness, gear storage and transport, a kids class, club umpire, the one who goes to courses and brings the knowledge back to share at club, regional or club coach, grading organiser, black belt patterns trainer.

To this end I've done the three following things this year, and would like to see more of the same. Because our tournaments had become a little same-same over the years I conceived of two projects for last year's National Tournament, which were carried forward after the pandemic saw it twice cancelled.

First was a demonstration. I called on great breakers and special techniques technicians to form a group and give a freestyle display of fun, exciting, athletic and crowd-pleasing feats, just like the pioneers gave as they travelled the globe to establish the International Taekwon-Do Federation. Perhaps being the first one in recent times made some of those who were asked a little reluctant, and the lack of tournaments meant some weren't happy to perform fitness-wise. Nevertheless the demonstration was very well received and achieved the several aims of bringing an atmosphere of excitement, raising up some of our athletes, and illustrating a recently dormant career path for members who need an outlet for their athleticism.

The second project was to prepare a slide show of several career paths in the competitive side – umpires, competitors, coaches and managers. The goals again were multiple: to raise the prestige of each role, to present career paths and bring a professional tone to Nationals.

Thirdly at the Nationals and two regional tournaments I gave a quick and simple training to umpires working on the power test and special techniques rings. Again by equipping our people ahead of time with knowledge / skill and an idea of what it will look like, we gained

with umpires who were confident and comfortable in their jobs, small errors and inexperience notwithstanding.

Another method for preparing umpires is one Master McPhail has done in his Warrior classes, and which I have adopted. Students practice being both competitors and umpires in groups, taking turns sparring say, and being a centre referee. Because of this exercise there is less that is unknown about both roles and members can participate in both with greater expertise and confidence.

I'm given to understand by Master Patterson that there is at times a 40% loss from Ngā Kaponga the New Zealand Team after a World Championships campaign. To my mind this is a tremendous loss of social capital. Our athletes are among the best prepared in the world and have so much to offer as experts in their events. If they had a pre-planted notion that there are opportunities in coaching, instructing, demonstrating and umpiring open to them once they are ready, we would be so much stronger. It would also make future coaches' jobs much easier if the learnings from past campaigns could filter out to clubs, so that new applicants came to trial and train further along than their predecessors.

We have six regions and one national team, and 60+ clubs, all of which need specialists to coach five different tournament events. We need to do better with coach development. Coaching as a career in Taekwon-Do must be talked about more, and have prestige backed by umpire and coaching qualifications. The ITF Coaches Committee of which I'm a member is preparing a second ITC Coaches Conference and a Taekwon-Do specific Coach Development Course. I would like to participate in each of these and see coaching colleagues do the same professional development.

Sport New Zealand also has short online courses on coaching which members interested in coaching can enrol in. I and a number of my Kiwisport team completed the Coaching Safety Net module in 2020. The courses are short, interactive and entirely online. (Sport New Zealand, 2021).

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A coaching pathway for our members should overlap with the umpiring pathway at the level of qualifications – both roles need up to date knowledge of the rules and how to apply / make best use of them. An athlete pathway should have the same overlap, for the same reason. I have to admit being surprised at how little overlap there is currently, and haven't yet understood the reasons for resisting such an obvious vocational tool.

Another pathway that I have taken up in the last half decade is paid instructing. Being able to work at something that brings me so much joy and that I have spent so many years studying is truly a blessing. I believe if we could present this pathway carefully and positively to more of our members, in particular older teens and young adults, we could go some way to solving the demographic crunch that is already upon us. It certainly isn't always glorious and delightful, but the skills a former competitor or young person has needn't go to waste – they're a tremendous asset as a paid instructor leading classes.

To prepare members to instruct at someone else's club relies on two things – Taekwon-Do knowledge and teaching methodology. If someone wants to run their own classes as a head instructor they need support with administration as well: hiring a venue, setting and managing fees, arranging gradings for instance.

Finally, an extension of something mentioned several times already. Young and fit members can and should be encouraged to attend camps and seminars as demonstrators. Not just as participants, but as overt helpers, experts showing how it's done. This is seen in some seminars and camps already. The Rounthwaites and Mr Sawden foster their younger members as experts by taking them on courses to demonstrate and help teach. National Kids Camp by Mr Brown and Mr Skedgwell has done the same for many years, and we see unrehearsed versions of this at Update Courses and IICs. Making it a little more official in umpire courses for instance, rather than calling for volunteers, identifying skilled practitioners and having them part of the course facilitator team, going to lunch with the senior umpires and having their photo alongside the presenter's on the website would build leadership in these young adults.

Make them special

- Ranks at all levels have been eroded in mana
- Times have changed, training isn't as strict, protocols have eased
- Talk them up
- Reserve things for them

It simply is not as special to be a senior now. Black belts of all ranks were once rare and revered. Now the dan ranks are all common with the exception of Grandmaster, but even they are frequent visitors and we have our own New Zealand Saseongs just over the horizon. We have more than 30 Saseongs in our ITF despite several leaving. In NZ we have 14 Sahuyns, 70 Sabums and hundreds of Boosabums.

Naturally people have relaxed over time, both in their attitudes towards dan ranks and in their own comportment at those ranks. So when a person reaches one of the major threshold ranks

like 1st or 4th or 7th dan they aren't afforded the tremendous respect such an achievement should hold. Senior Instructors everywhere have trouble getting their members to take on responsibility or rise to the new rank, or to increase or at least maintain respect toward the Instructor's own climbing rank.

Training is softer now. The old black belts broke the parquet floor at Papatoetoe Taekwon-Do before I joined. They did so many flying knuckle push ups that the thin timber laminate over the concrete floor gave out. I used to be afraid to wipe the sweat off my nose or eyebrows during class. The answer to everything was hit harder, more push ups, "Yes Sir!".

Thankfully we are better informed about rational training and teaching methods now, but along with the bathwater of tough as nails training went the twin babies of resilience and respect. It's common to see senior members ignored by juniors or have to ask students not to talk over them. Seniors also do themselves no favours by blurring the lines of the hierarchy on occasion.

Who wants to lead when there's no kudos attached?

We need to make people special again. Tell their stories, talk them up, publicly back them and show trust and support toward them, refer to them in formal language. When people reach the big ranks give a talk about their journey there. Interview them for Taekwon-Do Talk, introduce them at events and congratulate them, have a formal dinner to award their new rank or celebrate their NZ Team experiences. When people are nominated for National Awards read the nominations aloud at the Nationals Dinner, have the nominees up in lights at the tournament, show off the calibre of our members on the website and social media platforms. Introduce visiting members and Instructors at gradings – did you know Miss XYZ did a three board turning kick, did you know that Mr ABC did a flying side kick over a motorbike? Make a big deal out of our members' achievements.

Finally, as alluded to above, keep things aside that only seniors get to do. As mentioned already, at my club there are things that only older members (approximately 12+) get to do. The 1st to 3rd Dan Symposium this year is an excellent example, as is Stripes One To One. Making a bigger deal out of these kinds of events, and adding more, can only improve how leadership is seen and taken up in ITFNZ.

Conclusion

We have a youth leadership crisis upon us. The majority of our members are young and are not interested in leading. Our capacity as an organisation to preserve all parts of the Art and produce physically and mentally excellent martial artists is at risk.

Taekwon-Do does however provide excellent characteristics for leaders. We grow personally in confidence, clarity of purpose, an ethos of skill acquisition and public speaking.

International Taekwon-Do New Zealand has a culture of learning. Professional development is what we do. There are frequent opportunities to upgrade, built skill progression, qualification opportunities abound and our seniors lead by example in their own study.

The entire Art is predicated around learning, in physical, ethical and knowledge modes. In fact it is unusual to go to a class without expecting to learn something, at the very least a small reminder about something you haven't worked on for a while. Courses, camps and seminars are available to members at different levels and with various focuses, and there are handbooks, websites, encyclopedias, apps and quizzes for furthering ones knowledge.

Our skills are continually developed and there are frequent opportunities to earn new qualifications in both rank and knowledge. We host/attend International Instructor Courses and International Umpire Courses every two years and have annual Instructor Update Courses domestically. Our senior members lead by example, sharing new things they've learned and encouraging the membership to do the same.

Taekwon-Do teaches us to perform publicly as a matter of course. Standing in front of our seniors, peers and juniors happens every time we grade or compete and regularly in between. This gives us a springboard to leadership by voice and action.

In my instructing I include leadership modelling as a matter of course. Micro-leadership opportunities are given to all members overtly and implicitly. Students demonstrate, help one another, take warm ups and small groups, are responsible for equipment and are held up as models in class, as well as having their own separate classes.

Pedagogical development is essential. I teach how I teach while teaching. Explaining the hows and whys is how we instruct technique and it must be the same for teaching methodology and leadership in general.

I am preparing my departure at some hopefully distant time by attempting to prepare students who are capable in all areas of the Art, and can lead.

I have three main suggestions for retaining and training youth leaders. First we need to help members know what it'll be like and what's expected.

Secondly they need equipping with opportunities to study and practice – leading small groups and events, having roles, knowing which qualifications to pursue. If we arm our people with tools and an idea of what it's like to lead we can facilitate youth entry into leadership.

Third and most important of all: our people need to be valued, admired, held up as examples to which others can aspire. Fundamentally if we create prestige around leading roles, the membership will respect leadership vocations.

Give them sharpened tools. Show them what it's like. Praise them upward.

References

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