

The First Day At BUSHIDO-KAI

For over 50 installments now, I have offered some insights to the modern martial arts scene in attempt to help both potential and experienced students sort out the confusing methods, styles, arts, business practices, traditions, and attitudes found in the contemporary martial arts scene. It occurred to me, however, that walking a new student through his/her first class, might serve to alleviate some concern and fear of the unknown whether or not they are intellectually prepared by a year's worth of articles. I cannot say how other schools go about their first day since I have been a beginner in only four schools and that was way back in the '60s and '70s. I am sure schools differ a great deal in how supportive, friendly, and attentive they are to beginners. Those who are not very supportive think it is up to the student to want training so much that he/she will overcome a decided lack of instructor attention. Those who are super-attentive may be looking to talk the student into a more costly contract or a longer term of enrollment. At BUSHIDO-KAI, we are polite and respectful to visitors and novices. We want to give them every possible chance to start off on the right foot; then, if the arts are not for them, it will not be for our lack of trying. We are very selective of students — everyone has to enroll in a trial membership program before they are allowed a full membership — but they are made to feel comfortable so that we can observe their personalities under non-stressful conditions. Training will throw enough stress their way without our adding to the jetsam.

After having observed one or several classes and having made a deposit, the student arrives 30 minutes early, completes the financial transactions and is presented with manuals and handouts to help him in his studies. An assistant instructor will take him through various simple procedures including etiquette, classroom procedure, student cleaning assignments, and the proper wearing of the uniform.

The novice lines up at the end of the students, bows in, and warms up with them while a senior student stays near-by to inform and assist. Then a senior takes him or her aside for tutoring in falling, stances, and basic techniques. At the end of class, the student bows off the mat and records his hours of study. He/she is welcomed to return to one side of the mat for some self-training or to practice with fellow novices. Alternately, he/she may sit and watch the intermediate and senior classes or may leave until the next scheduled class.

As the head instructor, I try to quickly get some feedback from novices to see if they enjoyed their lesson, and to answer any questions. Unlike students in many schools, they are encouraged to ask questions especially of the assistant instructor who is tutoring them. After a few weeks of the beginner class, the assistant instructor moves them into the regular basic class to train with students of different levels of experience and skill. For the first few classes, he/she is put beside a senior student who can give pointers. In paired exercises, a senior partner will move at the novice's pace so that he/she feels conformable. After a few weeks, he/she has smoothly merged into the regular class and will be among the first to welcome new beginners to BUSHIDO-KAI.