

The Cost of “Dô”-ing Business: “The Way” Can Go Only So Far

Last time we talked about those martial arts schools that drop their standards for the sake of a successful business and those that feel obliged to maintain their standards regardless of the impact on their business. The traditional schools that refuse to play too many business games limit themselves because they feel they are following a path they do not want to see diverted. They do not mind “side-trips,” “a change of travel plans,” “taking in new sights,” or “using new modes of transport,” but they feel it non-beneficial to the development of their students to angle off in a totally different direction.

“Dô” in both Japanese and Korean (“Tao” in Chinese) is a Way of Life, a chosen path. In the modern world, “-dô” is used as a suffix for many of the martial arts. This adds a spiritual and self-development emphasis to an otherwise physical endeavor. The Dô, or more specifically, the head instructor’s interpretation of the Dô, is what delimits how far a traditional school will go to rake in the “dough.”

What are the self-imposed limitations of a traditional school? If I were to render a subjective judgment, I would guess that the following items are more valued than improved business and additional membership...

- (1) Meaningful ranks (one must have worked for and have senior students respect any ranks achieved);
- (2) A school that functions as a healthy family (everyone contributes to the whole and everyone is respected despite individual diversity);
- (3) Knowledge that is shared (seniors freely help juniors succeed rather than limiting them);
- (4) End-goals that are more substantive than ranks or certificates; and
- (5) In-depth learning rather than a superficial acquaintance with the art being studied.

These are the very things that seem to be negotiable in today’s Martial Arts Business world. In any business, an informed consumer tends to make a wiser decision so that the best businesses (those that benefit the consumer most) tend to rise. In martial arts, too few clients can really be knowledgeable about what they are learning and how it compares to what they *could be* learning. Too many consumers think they know what they want, but are not informed enough to see beyond superficial goals. So commercial schools address these superficial goals because, of course, this is what the market seems to want and what sells.

Chojun Miyagi, the founder of Goju-ryu Karate-do, said to a student in the 1930s, “What sort of martial arts do you want to study? There are true martial arts, dancing martial arts, superficial martial arts, playful-for-enjoyment martial arts.” In today’s world, very few schools do what Miyagi called *true* martial arts. This is very hard training, very long hours, and very deep study. It is not that some schools don’t hold this as their ideal, but practically, with people working 60-hour weeks, having to balance martial arts with family and other obligations, even the best of traditional schools modify **true martial arts**. Likewise, **dancing martial arts** (training for aesthetics and expression) are seldom seen. Instead, we see a lot of **superficial** and **playful-for-**

enjoyment martial arts. Of the two, I feel that the playful training is healthier and more honest than the superficial training, but it is the *superficial* masquerading as the *true* that tends to attract students.

It is up to the few non-superficial dojo to show the potential student the differences so that he/she can make an informed choice.