

# *Judge the School by the Student*

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When you visit a martial arts school, there are many ways to get the information you need to make a rational decision about training. You can read the promotional information (which, in most cases, should be taken with several grains of salt since its purpose is to emphasize only the positive aspects of the school.) You can talk to the head instructor or receptionist (which, also should be taken with some NaCl because they are, *de facto*, in a selling position.) You can talk to students before or after class (which is strongly recommended—most students will say complementary things about their own school, but they are not in a selling position and will tend to be more objective.) You can also quietly observe the class, noting the skills of the students relative to their rank, how the students and the instructor relate to each other, how students interrelate, and what their attitudes are on and off the practice area.

[The brochure BUSHIDO-KAI offers](#), for example, makes a sincere attempt to help the potential students (1) understand their purpose in studying martial arts, (2) understand their means of attaining their goals, (3) evaluate the schools they visit on at least 9 items (see below), (4) future-pace their involvement in the martial arts to see where they are going, and (5) take them through a start-up process to see if the school is right for them.

The nine items that BUSHIDO-KAI feels you should consider in observing a class are as follows:

- detail of instruction
- quality of communication
- respect between instructor and students
- respect between students
- helpfulness between students
- positive student attitude
- general warmth/friendliness
- physical facilities of school
- consideration for your interests.

Of these, the most important is your impression of the students on both a technical and a personal level. Will you feel comfortable relating to these people two or three evenings a week? Do they represent what you want to be at various levels of development?

You can be wildly impressed by the program, the skills of the instructor, or by the facilities (all are important in their own way,) but if it doesn't "feel" right, it isn't right for you. This feeling is derived from a number of stimuli, the most influential of which is probably the people.

If you are not allowed to talk to the students before or after class, ask yourself “Why?” If the students are not interested in talking to you, ask yourself “Why?” If students are rushed in, put through their paces and rushed out, ask yourself “Why?” If students do not arrive early to train or do not stay late for additional help, ask yourself “Why?”

The martial arts school can be run like a factory, a clinic, or a family. Everything can be assembly line perfect without feeling, or it can be personable, attentive, strict but helpful, warm but authoritative, and challenging but secure. The students of any school, during and after training, will reveal whether the school and its teacher places a value on students just getting the work done, correcting tonight’s training problems, or full personal development.

*Next week we’ll talk about the differences between studio and dojo, business and schools.*

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