

**SENSEI'S JOURNAL** © 2009 Bushido-kai  
Dojo Challenges from Both Student and Teacher's Point of View  
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INTRODUCTION

Truth be told, I really don't keep a journal. Goodness knows I have tried. All those motivational speakers and self-improvement majins recommend it, so it must make some sense. I kept one for about three weeks. I guess my organized life started to bore even me because I found that I was writing the same thing again and again. I also started other sorts of journals. Tony Robbins suggested a "Success Journal" to record things you could pat yourself on the back for when things seemed bleak. I had quite a few successes in that little book; then, when the next bleakness arrived, I sort of spent my energies on unbleak-ifying it. Once unbleak-ified, I had lost the habit of recording things in the journal. So officially, I don't keep a journal but I do take notes every once in a while. I write down something I might want to write up later on. Or it may be something I want to sort out my thoughts about. In college, I used a little hip pocket notebook to jot down images and concepts for future poems and short stories. Now, I make a note on my cell phone recorder or rush to my Mac to type in something or other.

It is of these passing ideas and my midnight ruminations on them that this "journal" is formed. I don't claim to have the wisdom of the martial arts sages, Zen masters, Shaolin monks or even Dr. Phil, Laura or Ruth. But I do have a rather unique point of view. After forty-five years of martial arts, I have some perspective. After having studied both hard and soft arts, I can see things with some objectivity. I probably have biases like everyone else but I have attempted, during my martial arts career, to see many different points of view as rationally as I could, but I find that our Western culture is becoming more and more emotional about its positions. Everyone hunkers down to defend the leftists or the rightists, the public sector or the private sector, the rebels or the powers that be. Luckily, in the martial arts, because we are all brothers and sisters in self-development and self-defense, that never happens. We are superbly tolerant, a-political, understanding, helpful, friendly, courteous, kind, obedient, cheerful, thrifty, brave, and clean, if occasionally irreverent. That and a bag of chips.

In 1964, I began studying judo at Brandeis University where I was majoring in English and American Literature. I like to think I was minoring in creative writing but Brandeis did not allow an official "minor" so I just took as many writing courses as I could. I worked hard at judo, traveling into Somerville's Tohoku Judo Club whenever I could get a ride. Benny Babineau, then a brown belt at Tohoku, was kind enough to transport me from Waltham to Somerville frequently during the school year. My judo instructor at Brandeis, Ron Seagal graduated in 1965 and I was left, as a white belt, with the management of the judo club. So, to some extent at least, I have been teaching the martial arts for almost as long as I have been studying them. I understand what it is to be a student but I also understand what it is to be an instructor — and I can see both points of view pretty dispassionately.

Students never realize that their Sensei/Sifu/Sabum, etc. was once a student, just as children cannot appreciate that their parents were once 5 or 10 or 15 years old. "But it's different now," they say. "That was ancient history!" they say, not realizing how they have subtly "complemented" their elders on the duration of their lifespan. To a small degree, however, the students and the children are right. Things have changed. To a large degree, however, they are mistaken. Elders tend to filter contemporary changes into their judgments and points of view. I hope I have done so, as well, in reviewing some of the passing problems and considerations that occur in a typical dojo/kwoon/dojang, etc.

Now, as regards my biases: I come down on the side of traditionalism rather than modernism. Quickly, let me say that I do not think rigid traditionalism is my cup of tea, either. There is an old saying that I will have to paraphrase here due my inability to find where I wrote it down before there were personal computers. It is from the poet Struthers Burt: Traditionalism is like a pipe conducting the flow of life-giving water. Without the restriction of the pipe, the water cannot be conveyed; but, the pipe is of no use if clogged with the refuse of antiquity.

That makes me a sort of an "innovative traditionalist", I suspect, or at least a traditionalist that does not

feel comfortable when pigeonholed with classicists. I respect both the skills preserved by classicists and those developed by modernists. I just feel that modernists are always reinventing the wheel so they can flaunt their new-and-different brand while classicists are always fascinated with the stone the original wheel was made of rather than investing in tires. So if you are a classicist (most of them don't read these types of articles anyway), know that I respect the job you are doing to preserve our history but that I am glad you are doing it rather than I. If you are a modernist, know that I respect your spirit of innovation and that I wish only that you would investigate a little more completely the nature of the stone wheel before you cover it with the latest artificial coagulate. If you don't share my point of view, that's okay. I hope to at least stimulate your neurons so that you too have some midnight ruminations on the passing problems and considerations that occur in a typical dojo/kwoon/dojang, etc. If those ruminations keep you, as a student or as a teacher, from sleeping half the night, think how many halves of the night I was kept up seeing both points of view. I have a class coming up soon — I think I'll take a nap.

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