

Big is Beautiful, Small is Functional

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The biggest advantage a martial arts business has over a martial arts club is that it makes enough money to afford a nice, large, clean facility. Many martial arts businessmen will argue that the martial arts school-as-business also produces the following advantages: (1) it allows the instructor to be a full-time martial artist rather than having to teach after a 8-10 hour workday, (2) it gives students more classes to better fit individual schedules, (3) it can afford additional benefits for students like seminars, competitions, travel for training, all of which cost money.

I would agree with every one of these benefits, but also advise the potential student to understand the flipside of each. Large facilities may often be too costly to maintain especially if they are in a locale chosen to bring in more business (the downside of location, location, location). Although the instructor's energies are not dissipated by a full-time out-of-dojo job, they can be enervated by a full-time at-the-dojo job. Teaching from 12 to 10 can be exhausting and the lessons can then turn out to be formulaic. If the student has more classes to choose from, he/she may not simultaneously have a choice of teachers. Who "teaches" the 3 to 3:45 slot and what are his or her qualifications? A successful martial arts business can certainly afford more events for their members, but too often these become *closed* events for *internal* money making, thus removing one of the prime benefits of such affairs—interacting with martial artists from other styles and schools.

Big can be beautiful, to be sure; but does the student always benefit from the beauty? Small schools have their advantages, too, the greatest of which is personal instruction and a lot of interaction with the senior students and the head instructor. Smaller schools have a smaller overhead and can usually afford to charge less. Smaller schools often ask for and benefit from volunteer activities. Sometimes just cleaning the school together, for example, binds the students to each other and to the school like no juice bar or pro-shop can hope to do.

Of course, the best situation is to have a balance of both sizes. This is not easy to do. It means that at some point, the martial arts businessperson has got to say, "enough is enough: we're not accepting any more students." It also means that the head instructor of the little club has to say, "I've got to systematize the business aspect of this enterprise to make its success more secure, both for me and my students." But it is very difficult for the club instructor to get started down the avenue of business without building up a desire to sprint to the bank. It is a rare head *honcho* who can balance the *budo* with the business.

At BUSHIDO-KAI, we grow slowly and carefully without over-marketing ourselves or taking attention away from active students in order to fill the floor with new students. We also insist on trial enrollments both for the sake of maintaining the quality of our students and to assure that our instruction truly appeals to a new student. This allows us to keep a stream of students coming in slowly and at a manageable rate, but keeps the student body small enough to offer personal attention and detail of instruction. At times, the student body is too

small. At times, when martial arts fads are pulling students toward other schools, we don't grow at the same rate. The balancing act of budo and business is not an easy one, but when it is done correctly, the small school becomes financially healthy and its students benefit from both quality instruction and maximum attention.

Next week, we'll suggest an "emotional" way for a prospect to determine the best art for him or her.