

Welcome New Students and Create a Sense of Community

One of martial arts instructors' most important and difficult jobs is creating a sense of community in their schools and classes. New students must feel accepted and that they belong. New students' relationships with fellow students are often more important than their relationship with their instructors. Your responsibility as a school owner is to teach your G.O.L.D. Leadership Team members and instructors how to integrate new students into their classes, while maintaining current students' interest and enthusiasm, and their positive attitude as part of the group.

The process of welcoming new students may be second nature to you and your instructors, but it's a lesson worth repeating, regularly. Although your G.O.L.D. Leadership Team members are not full-time instructors, they do have a vital role, assisting instructors and helping to make the classroom environment one in which students excel and enjoy their martial arts training. Consistent and persistent motivation and reminders will help ensure that everyone welcomes new students and quickly assimilates them into your routine.

Adopt the following school-community-building concepts and make them part of your regular training program for your instructors and G.O.L.D. Leadership Team members. Remember, some of your team members may very well become your future instructors, so it's never too early to start forming their professional attitudes.

Personally Greet Every Student and Their Parents

A personal greeting is not only common courtesy, but it is also an excellent method to introduce new

students to the discipline and respect you expect them to emulate as they develop as martial artists. Greeting parents of child-age students as well as students themselves is just as important, especially to demonstrate your professionalism from the beginning of your relationship with parents.

As part of your greeting, tell students you are glad to meet them, you look forward to them being in your class and that you are confident they will enjoy training, other classroom activities and their fellow students. A sincere and direct greeting will reduce new students' apprehensions about the new environment, and the mysteries of martial arts training.

Assign a Buddy

Making friends with current students and feeling accepted by them is critical to shaping new students' attitude about martial arts training. It's the experience of the first few classes that will have a primary effect on students' willingness to continue their training. The "buddy system" is a positive method for integrating new students and providing G.O.L.D. Leadership Team members and current students with leadership opportunities to contribute to the class environment.

Assign a G.O.L.D. Leadership Team member or an experienced student of the same age to buddy with each new student, especially during the first day. Explain that their assignment is to be with the new student throughout the class, helping him or her understand instructors' directions. The buddy should remain with the new student even during water breaks or other pauses in the class. New students should never be left alone, and always be encouraged by his or her buddy.

Class Introduction

Instructors should introduce new students to the class at the beginning of each lesson. New students raise

BLACK BELT LEADERSHIP

GUIDANCE ON LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

their hands, and then instructors lead the class in a loud and energized cheer, or clapping, to recognize and show support for the new students.

During a class break or at the end of class, current students should introduce themselves to new students by shaking hands and saying “hello.” This is an opportunity for G.O.L.D. Leadership Team members to show initiative and their leadership qualities by being the first to introduce themselves to new students, and reminding all current students to do the same. Instructors should repeat this process during new students’ first two classes or until they feel comfortable in their new environment.

G.O.L.D. Leadership Team members should also follow these steps when instructors assign them to work with smaller groups of students. Team members introduce him or herself, recognize new students with a cheer and asks every student in the group to introduce him or herself to each of the new students.

Positive Reinforcement

New students are often intimidated by their new surroundings and their unfamiliarity with martial arts training. Even the most coordinated new students generally feel uncoordinated and inept during their first lessons. Instructors as well as G.O.L.D Leadership Team members are able to alleviate much of this anxiety by complimenting new students regularly and often, during the first few lessons. If new students are children, then instructors should share their student compliments with parents in the presence of their children.

G.O.L.D. Team Lesson Drills

Use the following role-playing drills to help your instructors and G.O.L.D Leadership Team members learn how to make new students feel welcome and create a strong sense of community in the classroom.

1. Greet New Students

One instructor of the G.O.L.D team portrays an “instructor” and another is a new “student.” Practice a greeting five times and then switch

roles. The “instructor” should greet the “student” enthusiastically, with friendly eye contact and a smile, and address him or her by name. Vary this drill with the “student” acting as a new adult student and then a new child student.

A. Greet Parents of New Students

Another variation of this drill is for the “instructor” to practice greeting parents of a child student. An instructor or team member is selected to portray a parent or both parents.

2. Assign a Buddy

Create a role-playing drill where one instructor or team member portrays a team member or current student. Another instructor or team member portrays a new student. Ask the person playing the “buddy” to introduce him or herself to the new student, and state that he or she will be the new student’s buddy during the first class. The person portraying the “buddy” should be friendly and helpful, and encourage the new student with compliments. Ask the role players to do this drill five times and make each one slightly different.

3. Class Introduction (for instructors or advanced leadership team members)

Select an instructor or team member to portray a class instructor. Everyone else participating in these drill sessions align themselves as if they were students in a class. Select one of the “students” to portray a new student. The role-playing instructor introduces the new student with a smile, enthusiasm and pleasing voice inflection. The role-playing instructor then asks the new student to raise his or her hand, while leading the class in an enthusiastic cheer or clap.

A. Another variation of this drill is to select someone to portray a team member and a few role-playing “students” to simulate a team member working with a smaller group of students. The role-players practice the same drill, but in the small group setting.

4. Positive Reinforcement: Compliment and Goodbye

BLACK BELT LEADERSHIP

GUIDANCE ON LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Select instructors and/or team members to portray an instructor, a new student and a parent or parents of a child student. The “instructor” teaches a drill to the new “student,” asks him or her to try it a few times and then compliments the “student” for their effort and proficiency. Bow to the student and shake his or her hand. Always use the new “student’s” name, and compliment him or her with a smile and enthusiasm. Try this drill with the new “student” as an adult and a child.

- A. Select others to portray the parent or parents of a new child “student.” Practice sharing the compliment with the parents in the presence of the child.

Practice these drills with your instructors and G.O.L.D Leadership Team members regularly, and you’ll see new students respond more positively to martial arts training. You’ll retain more of them and promote a higher level of professionalism that will be easily recognized and appreciated by parents.