

Excellence Is in the Details!

There is nothing more inspiring to watch than great execution of a form or move. When a student snaps a kick correctly, the instructors know it, the students know it and the parents know it. Remember, a part of what we teach is the physical perfection of movement. Often, it is difficult to see the mental gains, but physical progress will be the proof that the training is effective.

The amount of time required for the physical gains to be evident depends on what skill is being learned and executed. Most instructors would agree that physical gains take time and the only way to ensure solid development of correct habits is to value and correct bad habits, ruthlessly.

One of your assistant's goals is to be always guiding students with methods that help them form correct habits. Students need a hands-on approach to learning, which is known as kinesthetic, and refers to the physical manipulation of techniques to perfect the execution of movement. All of your assistants should be well trained to use the kinesthetic approach during classes.

If you are a new teacher on the floor, then teach your G.O.L.D. team the following easy tips. If you are a veteran teacher, then these tips should serve as excellent reminders.

1. Start with an understanding of the importance of the instruction.

Your assistants and students are no different than others; they want to know why they are doing a task or exercise (the importance of it), before they will be motivated enough to focus on its accomplishment.

Use this example to help you express this idea with your team:

"One of the most important roles you will have on the floor is to be an extension of me. I will be leading the class from the front; however, it is difficult for me to reach all the students at precisely the right time during class. This will be your responsibility. I want each of you to anticipate and observe who will need help and

be there when they need it. I want every student to feel like he or she is the only one in class. Together, we will accomplish this goal."

2. View the students as Michelangelo would.

When Michelangelo created the statue of David from a single piece of marble, he did not take a sledgehammer to it, but carefully chiseled the marble to reveal the David within. In fact, the artist often declared that his real creative ability was not shaping the stone, but "seeing" the final object captured in the stone, and revealing it. In other words, David was always in the stone, but only Michelangelo was able to observe it, which means only he could reveal it to the world.

Now, it may seem presumptuous to think your leadership team members have, or should have, the same "eye" as Michelangelo. You and your students don't need geniuses, however, but assistants who will learn and apply the two lessons the Michelangelo story teaches.

First, they must learn that Black Belt excellence is not created in one class, but rather by the continuous and careful "chiseling" of each student's technique through continual feedback and touch.

Second, your G.O.L.D. team members should try to "see" the Black Belt inside, so a student's natural abilities, desire to achieve and motivation to excel are not pounded into dust by an overzealous assistant who tries to "shape" the raw materials aggressively into his conception of what the outcome should be. A work of art is not the artist's alone; the materials, even when raw, contribute significantly to the outcome.

3. Know your students.

Some students enjoy the personal attention of instructors and assistants, while others become embarrassed by it. Some are motivated when pulled aside for a one-on-one lesson. For others, receiving individual instruction feeds their negative opinions of their abilities.

The first responsibility of new G.O.L.D. team members is to know students. This requires your help, however, and a strategy. You may think that time and experience will eventually allow your team members to know the students by name as well as ability, attitude and personality. That may take weeks and months, and waiting that much time can easily become an obstacle to instruction as well as learning, and adversely affect students' perception of the value of their training and their retention.

A wiser strategy is to be proactive: Don't wait for time and experience; start the learning process from day one of class. Invest some class time to review class attendance with the active assistants. This focused review will quickly reveal each student's strengths, weaknesses and plans for improvement. Provide your assistants with this information at the beginning, before any false judgments are made of a student's abilities.

Often, it is easy to misread Attention-Deficit Disorder (ADD) as laziness, or anger as intensity. As the head instructor on the floor, you know your students. Share your knowledge with your assistants, so they have a clear, detailed picture of each student, and are able to improve his or her skills to help each student advance.

4. Teach your assistants correct timing.

Instructional flow is important to the quality of a high-energy class. A portion of class time may be designated for drills that are designed simply to raise energy. There may also be times when the pace of the class is fast. Many, if not most, rookie assistants will try to correct a student's move during a fast-pace routine, which, often, creates more distraction than improvement.

Write a class plan, with designated time periods for feedback and hands-on corrections as well as individual practice. Make sure your assistants study and learn the plan, especially to know when you want them to intervene and correct a student. Individual practice time provides your assistants with opportunities to adjust postures and positions, so students understand exactly how to execute the technique.

Teach your assistants to spend more time observing than correcting. By carefully watching students perform their routines, your assistants will be better prepared

to provide immediate feedback and only at the specific point in time designated by your class plan.

5. Perform portions of the class at a slower pace.

Your class plan should also designate time to slow the pace of instruction, so your assistants are able to make real-time corrections. Teach them that it is important to make those corrections and adjustments quickly. Nothing is more frustrating to a struggling student than to hold a position for a long period of time (20 seconds or more), while an assistant is explaining a routine.

Teach your assistants when it is appropriate to take a student aside for one-on-one instruction. If an assistant is unable to correct a student's difficulty with a technique within 20 seconds, then the student should be taken aside for individual instruction.

Nothing is accomplished when the assistant tries to "build the correct structure" on a weak "foundation." Adding more movements to the one that is already incorrect is not only a disservice to the student, but also results in poor instructional techniques by your assistants.

6. Appropriate touch!

A point that shouldn't need repeating, but repeat it anyway, and often, is that to teach a physical skill requires that the instructor physically touch the student. Assistants should always take an instructional position with a student that reinforces professional coaching. Always maintain a critical eye of instructional activity throughout the class to ensure that students, parents and visitors always perceive the hands-on nature of martial arts teaching as totally professional.

The martial arts is the greatest physical lifestyle activity that can improve a person's quality of life. It's the responsibility of you and your G.O.L.D. team to give your students every opportunity to succeed. For many, your program will be a positive, life-altering experience.

Your assistants and their training are critical to personalizing instruction within a class setting, so that each student knows by the end of each class that he or she has made progress. Focus your assistants' training on this goal and everyone will benefit from the positive changes in the quality and quantity of your student population.