

Eliminate the Fear and Put Your Staff on the Positive Path to Success

A Story About Fear

“Do the thing and you will have the power, act boldly and unseen forces will come to your aid.”

Ralph Waldo Emerson

I remember standing on the edge of the diving board of the Temple University swimming pool, staring down into what seemed to be a vast, bottomless ocean. I was 5 years old, nervous, scared and uncertain, as I meticulously checked to make sure that the straps of my Mickey Mouse life vest were securely fastened. A voice from the side of the pool was encouraging me, “It’s OK! Don’t worry! I’ll make sure you are safe!” Those words, although reassuring, could not slow the rate at which my heart was beating. I stood tall, and began to breathe deeply. Once more, I looked down to the side of the pool and listened to the same words of encouragement, “It’s OK! Don’t worry! I’ll make sure you are safe!” My heart was beating even faster now. A chill passed down my back, as I took another deep breath.

At that moment, I made a decision to take action on a goal that I had told my mom and dad just last week, “I will jump from the big diving board into the deep end!” One more deep breath; and there it was. I bent my knees, closed my eyes and jumped into the unknown. The drop felt like a mile before I hit the water. My heart was still racing, but instead of feeling scared, I felt the thrill of exhilaration. I quickly swam to the surface, with the aid of my Mickey Mouse life vest, and hurried to meet the voice from the side of the pool. I caught my breath, looked up and said, “Dad! I did it!” He replied, “Congratulations. You accomplished a goal by overcoming your fear.” I then asked, “Can I do it again?”

Understanding Fear and Recognizing Professional Fear in your Staff

Fear occurs as a result of a specific set of neural conditioning in the brain, formed by past, present and perceived future experience. In other words, the events in your life create fear. It is learned! “The economy is suffering.” “We invested our entire advertising budget on a campaign that failed.” “I don’t think I can afford a mortgage.” “I had a bad experience during our vacation. I’m nervous about going there again.” These are all fears (big and small) that you and others have probably expressed.

The exciting part about fears is the fact that *if they can be learned, they can be un-learned* and redirected into waves of confidence. The neural conditioning in our brain can be reformed, and shaped to suit goals, desires, needs and wants. Understanding this concept is important, given the fact that most people experience professional fears: elements of the workplace that **trigger nervousness, anxiety and hesitant action**. As a leader, school owner and manager, it is imperative that you recognize professional fears in your staff, and systematically eliminate them through training and feedback. Consider the following two examples.

1. You just hired a new instructor. He is 21, loves the martial arts, and is a respected competitor and a good teacher. Until you hired him, he has been a student at your school. One of his goals during the next five years is to open a school of his own. You notice that after every class, however, he finds some type of excuse to go straight to the office without speaking to any of the parents, answering questions or targeting any upgrade potentials (which is a key component of his job).
2. There is list of 10 students who are potential upgrade candidates. You ask one of your instructors on Monday to call each student on the list and present the

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Black Belt Club/Leadership Team/Masters Club. It is now Thursday; your instructor is doing a great job at the school, with one exception, he did not make his calls.

In these two examples, each staff member chose not to take action in the face of fear. "What if the upgrade candidates say 'no'?" "What do they think of me?" "I don't know what to say!" In any professional setting, especially in the relationship-driven martial arts industry, this type of reaction because of fear will happen. As an employer, recognize it and take positive action to correct it.

Three Principles to Stimulate Confidence and Eliminate your Staff Members' Fear

Repetition breeds familiarity; familiarity breeds confidence

Great martial arts teachers understand the importance of repetition. They ask their students to perform specific techniques again and again. They disguise the repetition to keep the technique exciting, and then continue until the technique is so ingrained in students' minds that it becomes second nature. Even after this process, great instructors hold review classes, refresher courses and private lessons to ensure student success. These instructors understand (consciously and/or unconsciously) that repetition breeds familiarity and familiarity breeds confidence.

In the same respect, your staff members need repetition in their professional development: handling parent objections, teaching a new form, phone techniques, presenting a Black Belt Club upgrade, student/parent interaction, recruiting new students, etc. Treat your staff members' development the same way you would a Yellow Belt student in your martial arts class. Teach your staff members the tools that it takes to succeed, and practice them repetitively, during daily, weekly and monthly staff meetings. Keep in mind some of the most powerful educational concepts in the industry: trial and error (with feedback), role-play, networking, discussion and research.

Lastly, consider the two following questions. "What would I do to ensure that a martial arts student in class

succeeds when performing a specific technique?" "Do I apply the same philosophy to develop my staff?"

Relate from the trenches

Successful martial arts school owners, managers and educators can draw from many experiences. Most of these experiences are positive, while others may have been negative. There is a wealth of knowledge available for the purpose of developing your staff. With this vast knowledge, the potential to relate to your staff members in a professional manner is endless. This is key because human beings trust and have confidence to what they can relate.

A great tool to develop staff members is to "relate from the trenches." In other words, a leader is able to provide a similar experience and how he overcame the challenge at hand. For example, a staff member may be struggling on the phone, promoting an upcoming event. He may be stumbling over his words, communicating the wrong information, etc. A martial arts professional "relates from the trenches" by saying, "When I first starting making calls I had a tough time. I felt completely confident on the mat, but I was insecure on the phone. One of my managers suggested that I write a small script, and rehearse it before making any calls. This helped me tremendously. Try it out, or, better yet, let me show you how to do it."

Sir Isaac Newton once said, "Stand on the shoulder of giants." Martial arts leaders are the giants, and the staff members are standing on their shoulders.

"What does it mean to me?"

Answering the question, "What does it mean to me?" feeds the W.E.I.T. (whatever it takes) attitude in staff members and human beings in general. It ignites a fire that will propel your staff to work towards achieving the two key goals of your school: Attracting new students and keeping them. answering, "What does it mean to me?" completes both sides of an if/then statement. For example, "If our retention rate improves by x %, as compared to last year, then the staff bonus will be \$x.xx." "If we enroll x number of students, then commission bonuses will increase by x%." "If our current active student count increases by x number, then I'll pay for front-row tickets to your favorite..."

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Answer the question, "What does it mean to me?" for your staff, by showing them tangible examples of success, and watch them ignore professional fears, as if they did not exist.

Conclusion

I recommend that you implement these three principles to develop the skills of your staff members. They are ideas that only work if you apply them. Take action, be consistent and motivate them to overcome their professional fears. Do this enough and your staff will ask, as I did when I was a little kid, "Can I do it again?"