

Use “Perception Selling” to Maximize Your Classroom Experience

Perception can be defined as the sensory interpretation of given external stimuli. That probably reads a bit like your Psych 101 class, but it is easily understood in a martial arts context. For example, a new student, enrolled in an empowering martial arts program, will mentally perceive that environment as one of excitement, enthusiasm and trust. Conversely, a new student, enrolled in a nonconstructive, pessimistic program, will quickly develop a negative perception of the martial arts as a whole. Perception is like a pair of binoculars through which you view elements in the world. Different “perceptive binoculars” provide infinite combinations of shading, lighting, sizes, shapes, interpretations and analyses for the individuals viewing the world with them. Any given social situation can be interpreted in countless ways depending on who is watching and the type of binoculars that he or she is using.

Our mission, as martial arts educators, is to build our students on a foundation of success. We are leaders who employ effective communication techniques to convey a positive message. We construct our classes for the purpose of motivating, inspiring and making a substantial difference in the lives of the students that we serve. The ability of a martial arts educator to communicate his message in a clear and concise manner is paramount. This communication is received by students in the classes and, ultimately, translated by their perception.

During any given martial arts class, there are three basic perceptions.

- 1) The perception of the instructor conducting a class.
- 2) The perception of the students participating in a class.
- 3) The perception of the audience observing a class. The audience could include parents, grandparents, friends, family and prospects.

In this setting, it is vital to sell effectively the program and you, as a professional, in a way that satisfies all three perceptions.

Five Keys to Enhance Your Perception Selling Ability

There are five keys that can enhance your perception selling ability and maximize the results of your classroom experience.

1. Use empowering language to captivate your students and audience.

Language is a powerful tool that can either captivate your crowd or cause boredom. Make a difference in your class by using language that inspires, motivates and sends a call-to-action to your students and audience. Imagine you are an artist with a colorful palette of choices. Don't limit yourself to one color to create your work. Utilize an assortment of colors, angles and positive images to make your work come alive.

There are roughly 490,000 words in the English language. The average English-speaking person uses a vocabulary that consists of 5,000 – 6,000 of those words. Imagine the enhanced effectiveness of your classroom communications, if you were to increase this average by 1%, just 50 to 60 words. Those new words and phrases have the potential to take your students and audience to new heights of understanding, excitement and achievement. Challenge yourself to create an expanded vocabulary filled with ideas that will make a difference. Dare to grow and refuse to settle for anything less than extraordinary.

2. Conduct your classes in a way that addresses your students' needs.

“Needs-analysis selling” is the process of determining clients' needs before you recommend a specific product or service, and then provide it. When you take your car to the body shop, the mechanic will

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ask, "What can I do for you?" or "What seems to be the problem?" The mechanic must understand why you've brought him your car, before he can perform any service.

During your martial arts classes, this concept serves as a powerful tool to maximize your experience. For example, let us assume that you are about to teach a class of five-year-olds. Before you step onto the floor, you notice that many of the students are laughing, playing and not sitting still. The junior instructors are sitting patiently with the children, but, nonetheless, they continue their disruptive behavior. As you turn and look to the left, the audience is observing the class and gesturing at the children, prompting them to sit straight and pay attention.

In this situation, the needs-analysis is simple. You need to reinforce the concept of self-control. You might say the following, "OK, class, stand and place your hands at your sides. Today, we will practice self-control. Everyone say, 'self-control.' Self-control means that we use our mind and body to help us improve at karate, doesn't it? Can we improve if we are silly or playing in class?" From this point, integrate the self-control concept with your lesson plan for the day.

In the above example, self-control was the major need of the students. By targeting and addressing this need during your teaching and drills and in your classroom organization and use of language, you will have successfully engaged in perception selling.

Your martial arts program is ready to solve countless student needs. Determine those needs and then serve your students. Practice needs-analysis every day and record your results. Keep those records in a notebook or laptop. Review them every day and to improve your teaching and strive for excellence.

3. Communicate on the visual, auditory and kinesthetic levels.

You learn and communicate at your best when two or more of the senses are involved. Consider the following image. An intermediate-level class is standing at attention, facing a lesson plan posted at the front of the room. The head instructor steps onto the mat enthusiastic and excited and announces, "Today, class, we will give 100%. We will practice today's lesson plan with such exhilaration that we'll take our martial arts skill to the next level! As your

instructor, I will give you everything I have, and I want to see your best! Is everyone ready to start?"

The class replies with a motivated spirit, "Yes, Sensei!" Throughout the class, the instructor demonstrates the way he wants his students to do the drills. He refers to the weekly quote written in bold letters on the board. He asks the audience to applaud whenever his class performs a given drill, correctly. While the students are engaged in pad work he makes sure that their stances and hand positions are correct, creating the feel of a private lesson in a group class. Everyone in class is electrified by the presentation and feels a personal connection with the instructor.

The best martial arts instructors are masters at teaching on the visual, auditory and kinesthetic levels. They use images, props, motivational quotes, voice fluctuation and power analogies to create a lasting effect on the three class perceptions: instructor, students and audience. Take initiative in your classes today. Challenge your creativity to develop new drills that will reveal your message in new, exciting ways.

4. Reinforce your lesson plan with real life examples.

Educational psychology teaches that abstract concepts are learned and understood progressively through the accumulation of concrete examples. For instance, if you were to ask a seven-year-old child in a beginner's class to define "confidence," then she might respond, "Confidence means to keep your hands up and to be strong." The concrete explanation, "keep your hands up and be strong," adds to the abstract understanding of "confidence." At the other end of the spectrum, you might ask an adult beginner to define "martial arts" to which she might reply, "Martial arts is a system of fighting, self-defense and physical conditioning." In both cases, the principle remains the same.

To bring out the best in your students, educate them in a way that guides them from concrete explanations to abstract understanding. Give examples that show how the martial arts relate to your students and to your audience. Use this principle wholeheartedly and consistently for greater results in your martial arts classroom.

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5. Selling 101: Transfer your excitement about the martial arts in a positive, lasting way.

Your level of excitement determines the excitement level of your classes. If you are tired, unmotivated and careless with your action, then expect the same result from your students. The power of persuasion is strong both positively and negatively. Be a positive believer and let it reflect in your martial arts school. Have the courage to be innovative and inspiring and your teaching will soar to new heights.