

Partnering With Local Schools and Teachers

Now that the second half of the school year has started, it's the perfect time to create a partnership with your local schools and their teachers, especially where your students attend. Use the remainder of this school year to plan and develop relationships with the public and private schools, so you'll be prepared to benefit even more from those relationships in the fall.

Martial arts schools that regularly sponsor public school activities enjoy an enhanced reputation in their communities, which results in growing enrollments, better retention and additional opportunities to promote your many positive messages.

To become involved in your local public schools, start with a plan you can easily manage. You may want to try just one or two of the ideas in this report, before launching a more comprehensive plan.

Remember, your goal is to become a true partner with schools and teachers, with ideas that benefit everyone, but especially the students. At first, you may discover it is difficult to interest the school systems in your partnership program, but apply some of that Black Belt persistence and perseverance and, given the right circumstances, you will begin to attract their attention.

If one specific idea doesn't seem to work, then try another. You may have also tried the first idea at the wrong time during the school year. It's often a good idea to spend some time becoming familiar with the local school system first, before developing a plan. Learn the names and faces of the superintendent, school principals, athletic coaches and teachers, especially those of your students. If you happen to cross paths with them at the mall, a restaurant or in the park, then introduce yourself. Don't give them a big spiel or hard sell, just a brief, light introduction of yourself, your school and its mission.

Consider the following ideas and promotions for your school partnership program. More importantly, use these ideas to stimulate your thinking (and that of your

staff) especially to develop ideas that address specific needs in your local schools.

Volunteer to Be a Guest Speaker

Your local school system may have an official "Volunteer Speakers Bureau" in which you can participate. Contact schools, teachers and/or parents' organizations for more information. Remember, speaking to parents' groups can be even more beneficial than speaking to a classroom of students.

Before you volunteer, spend some time developing a list of topics and talking points for each. Don't write a speech, but learn to speak from notes; or take the time to memorize your points. As a professional instructor, you should be able to talk spontaneously about any of these topics.

The objective is to develop a reputation as an expert, from the perspective of school officials. As part of this process, be prepared to provide copies of your school brochure if you have one and publicity clippings from the local newspapers. You can also direct school officials to your school's Web site, so they can easily understand your mission, program and the benefits of your training for children in the community.

Use the following list of topics as a starting point:

- Random Acts of Kindness
- Black Belt Study Skills
- Goal Setting and Goal Achieving
- Bully Basics
- Stranger Danger
- Seasonal Safety Tips
- Words of the Week Presentations (from NAPMA NOW)
- Non-violent Conflict Resolution
- Say "No" to Drugs

- How to Be a Positive Role Model

Review past issues of NAPMA NOW and other materials in your monthly NAPMA Professional Packages to find more topics and to help you develop your talking points.

Direct Contact

The direct approach is often the best method to establish rapport with teachers; and, especially when you can share a common teaching situation or subject. For instance, any schoolteacher can easily and immediately relate to the issue of classroom behavior. You can work that issue two ways to your benefit.

Make a list of your best-behaved students. Do a little research to determine the teachers of those students. Write a note or letter (See example below.) to send to each teacher. The purpose of the letters is to start dialogues with those teachers.

Tell the teachers that you want to communicate with them periodically to check on your students to be sure the best behaved ones are doing well in school.

Once you've established a rapport with those teachers, inform them that you are prepared to help them with students who have behavior problems, so they can improve and enjoy success. Offer the teachers printed information and online resources they can share with parents, or even volunteer to speak with the parents.

Once again, the basic strategy is to become an expert, even the hero, in the minds' of the teachers (and ultimately parents). You are available to help them and their students, make their jobs easier and enrich their curriculum with the martial arts teaching perspective.

Example of Letter for Best-Behaved Students

(Note: Use your school's letterhead and carefully space and prepare your letter, so it is professional.)

Dear <Mrs. Jones>,

<John Smith> is a student at our martial arts center, with an excellent learning, attendance and behavior record.

Because his scholastic performance is also a major part of his development, I wish to communicate with you from time to time about his attendance, grades and respect for you and the other students.

Knowing <John> as I do, I will not be surprised if he is one of your model students.

An important concept in our curriculum is "Black Belt Excellence." We teach our students character development lessons that motivates them to strive to be their best at home, at school and at all times.

Giving back to the community is also one of those lessons. Our professional staff always try to lead and teach by example, which is why they are available as speakers to give free school talks on subjects, such as Non-violent Conflict Resolution, Goal Setting Success, Black Belt Study Skills and many others.

We want to share these concepts with you and your students to help make your job easier and help to develop more students like <John>.

Please feel free to contact me in reference to John's performance or to schedule a free school talk.

Thank you,

<YOUR NAME>

Chief Instructor

After you have scheduled your first talk and it has been a success, ask the teacher if she would write a short testimonial letter. Offer to speak to the entire student body or assist with other school promotions.

Use your testimonial letter to help you schedule appearances at other schools. Display a copy on the wall in your school for visitors and students to see and read.

Prepare and distribute a press release each time you are a guest at a school for an event or a talk. You may also invite media representatives to attend or include a summary of your talk with the press release.

Participate in School Special Events

Obtain an annual calendar of events from the appropriate schools. You'll discover various opportunities to become involved: carnivals, auctions, special contest promotions, teach-ins/career days and field trips.

Carnivals: Rent a booth; donate prizes, such as guest passes; recommend and manage games; or

BLACK BELT **MARKETING**

MARKETING STRATEGIES FOR THE OWNER AND INSTRUCTOR

volunteer, as needed. Offer to present a martial arts demonstration.

Auctions and Special Contest Promotions: These types of events need items for bid and prizes. Offer free lessons and/or merchandise. Suggest a quick demonstration, as part of the bidding process for your items or just before prizewinners are announced.

Teach-ins/Career Days: For teach-ins, volunteer to speak on subjects that allow you to introduce martial arts concepts, such as physical education, healthy lifestyles, the psychology of confidence, the science of martial arts or even martial arts as history. For career days, present the opportunities of martial arts as a career.

Field Trips: Offer your school as a field-trip destination. Not only can you distribute literature and guest passes, but also you can teach the class a quick, introductory lesson.

Recognize and Reward the Hard Work of Teachers

Teachers are a special group of professionals; they work very hard with students and receive few kudos. They know they can make a difference in children's lives—and martial arts instructors, of all people, should understand how they feel—and lead the community in recognizing and rewarding their hard work.

Here are some simple ways to show thanks to your students' teachers:

- Invite your students' teachers to belt promotions.
- Host a special self-defense seminar for them at your school.
- Offer a discount to teachers who want to enroll in lessons.
- Call or write a note that simply expresses the thanks of one professional to another.

Donate Student Rewards

Most teachers have some type of incentive program to motivate their students; and they always need new incentives. Help teachers recognize the excellence of their students with special rewards, such as lessons,

logo-imprinted items, T-shirts and a recognition certificate co-sponsored by your school. Be creative and think of more.

Donate Classroom Supplies and Educational Resources

There are plenty of opportunities to help sponsor a class or a group of children by donating supplies and other educational resources. Faced with budget cuts, many teachers spend their own money on supplies and resources for their classrooms. In many districts, parents must buy supplies for their children that schools have historically provided.

Contact local schools and teachers, and volunteer to help. Ask them for a list of supplies, materials and resources they need. Demonstrate your leadership qualities and organize other business owners to contribute.

If you decide to provide standard school supplies, then many of them can be imprinted with your school's name and/or logo. You will have to order a minimum amount of imprinted supplies, so shop for the best price. An Internet search may be your best source. Standard items include pencils, erasers, boxes of crayons, small pads of paper and book covers.

Create even more of a positive impact on children by adding motivational messages, such as "Treat others with respect." to those school supplies that have the imprint space. Ask the teachers what messages or themes are most appropriate for their classes.

Conclusion

This Strategic Report is just the beginning of how you can become more involved with your local school system and its teachers. Use this opportunity as the basis of a G.O.L.D. Team leadership class. Ask your team members to write a list of additional ideas; and then make sure they participate.

Establishing a rapport with the academic school system does not occur overnight; in fact, administrators and teachers may not be interested the first time to contact them and propose a partnership. Don't be discouraged. Be persistent, but professional. Remember, just as you teach your students to take many small steps to achieve a big goal, you must be

BLACK BELT **MARKETING**

MARKETING STRATEGIES FOR THE OWNER AND INSTRUCTOR

patient. Administrators and teachers are very busy professionals, too.

Don't always expect a "one-to-one" return on your investment of time and effort with the local school system. Your reward will come because you were willing to "give back" without any thought of reward. It takes time for your beneficial nature of your school talk or other opportunities to be passed by word-of-mouth among teachers, parents and community leaders.

Maybe the best reward is when your students, who attend those schools, proudly tell their friends,

"That was my martial arts instructor that spoke in our class today."