
BLACK BELT LEADERSHIP

GUIDANCE ON LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Take Your G.O.L.D. Team Leadership Lessons into Your Community

Providing your G.O.L.D. Team members with opportunities to assist during your classes certainly develops their leadership skills; however, equally important is the leadership experience they'll gain when they participate in community-based projects.

In fact, community-based projects should be a part of your belt-testing requirements at every belt level. When your students have the opportunity to choose their projects, gather resources, initiate their plans and accomplish their projects goals, they are learning leadership in a "real-world" environment, outside the classroom, and that is an invaluable lesson.

You can begin to develop a community-based projects program for all your students with the following ten steps.

1. Start with Small Projects

Just as you teach your students to set small goals that lead to the accomplishment of larger goals, you should guide your students to experience success with smaller community projects before tackling more complex projects. This is especially true for your younger students.

2. Your New Role

You become more than an instructor; you now become the leader and advisor of a group of your community's children that are focused on turning their personal interests into projects that benefit their community, instead of misdirecting their energy and skills on frivolous activities.

3. A New Selling Point to Parents and/or the World



Once you adopt community-based projects as part of your school's curriculum and your students' advancement, you have a new "selling" point to present to parents of prospects. This becomes a benefit to children and parents that few if any other activities can provide—which makes this "selling" point anything but selling.

Use this example to present your program to parents of prospective students.

"Mrs. Mother-of-a-Student, my role at the school is to use the martial arts as an educational tool to teach my students about courage, focus, concentration, perseverance, patience, effort, teamwork and other invaluable life-skills. I only know I'm successful when I see them apply these concepts or character traits to their lives and the lives of others outside my school and outside the realm of physical martial arts. My community-based leadership-training program challenges my students to use what they practice in the school in real-world situations. In the old days, I put trophies in my school's windows, as I thought they were symbols of my success as a teacher. Today, my trophies are the community-based projects my students accomplish, each one an example of my ability to impart what is most important about the martial arts and life."

4. Do It First!

The best way to start a community-projects program is for you (and, maybe, your key

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players) to do it first. Choose 10 projects, small, medium, and/or large, and experience and educate yourself first-hand about the value of such a program.

For example:

- Commit to perform and record in a journal 50 acts of kindness. Be creative and narrow your acts of kindness to specific groups or needs, such as acts of kindness to students, staff members, animals, local charities, etc.
- Plant 10 trees and help save the planet. Preferably, you would plant them where they're welcome and will thrive. When I say "trees," I mean little seedlings; no backhoes needed. Consult with your local nursery, so you select and plant indigenous trees that don't need much care.
- Organize a clean-up project. Your garage may need to be cleaned, but it doesn't count as a "community" project, even though you're certainly an upstanding member of the community. This should be a clean-up project that addresses some neglected lot or street corner that's always strewn with trash. Call your local senior citizens center or the community service liaison at a local hospital and ask if there are seniors that need their yards cleaned. Organize a small army of people to do in an hour or two what it would take you a month to do on your own.

These are the kind of smaller projects that are easy to manage. You're only limited by your imagination and resourcefulness. You'll be better prepared to guide your students through the process, and successfully, once you have experienced a number of projects.

5. Make a Joyful Noise!

You must do more than just select and complete a project. You must record it and use

it to teach your students some valuable lessons about community activism and social responsibility. You don't want to miss a wonderful opportunity to show your students, their families and your community how to turn the action-philosophy of the martial arts into something valuable and important to the world.

Record your project and efforts on your school's Web site, or an instructor's blog. Let your students see what you're doing, and learn vicariously from your experiences. Many of your projects could be newsworthy, so prepare press releases and distribute them to the local news media—the exposure is free.

6. Visit www.thekidshalloffame.com.

A retired schoolteacher started The Kids Hall of Fame to honor kids throughout the world, with extraordinary accomplishments. A girl is recognized for soliciting 40,000 books from her community and starting libraries in schools that couldn't afford them. A young man builds 100 bikes a year and gives them to underprivileged kids. Many of these kids have accomplished so much that it makes you wonder if you couldn't inspire your students to "hall of fame" status. If you could, then what would it mean for your school and the education you provide your students?

7. Search The Internet

Search for "Community Projects for Kids" on the Internet. Visit a few of the Web sites that appear in the search results, and you'll be convinced that you won't have ANY problems finding resources for your community-based projects. There are planning forms, ideas, examples and entire organizations that help parents, teachers and kids to start their projects in the direction of success.

8. Become a Documentary Filmmaker

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Modern digital video cameras and editing technology can make you a documentary filmmaker quite easily. Record your students planning and completing their projects. Your students will think that is super COOL! Your students, their parents, and even your staff and visitors, want to see themselves or your students in the movies, especially when they are helping their community.

Tape your cleanup project! Load it on your Web site, so potential students and their parents can see what an interesting and community-oriented school you own. Few methods will communicate the essence of your school so well with teachers, parents and the media.

9. Turn to Nature

Richard Louv, in his book, *Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature Deficit Disorder*, suggests that many kids are so captured by digital technology in the form of TV, video games, cell phones, iPods, etc. that they've lost any connection to or interest in the natural world. As a result, they suffer from a variety of maladies. When you implement projects that benefit the environment—and require your students to be outside, in nature—not only do you serve the planet, but also (if what Louv claims is true) you help your students to regain a connection to the real world.

10. Seek Help from Parents, Grandparents and Teachers

Imagine, if one of your students went to one of his or her teachers and said, "Do you have any ideas for projects I could do that might benefit the community?" Better yet, what if he or she said, "Let's do a project together that will benefit the community!"

These days' kids just don't talk like that! Well, the kids that go to YOUR school do, or will,

when you develop a community-projects program.

Use the resources of parents, grandparents and academic teachers to help make your program work in your school. Parents and grandparents are likely to be already involved in the community or know those who are.

Collectively, the parents and grandparents of your students have many personal and professional experiences that should help you develop your program.