

Turning the Bad Into the Good: The Ultimate Skill of a Martial Arts Teacher



You teach the martial arts—or you help teach or you plan on teaching/assisting/helping in a martial arts school. You're the owner, you're the manager, you're the head instructor, you're the senior student, you're the assistant, you're the staff member, the Program Director, the SWAT member, or you have a some other title (or all of the above). Whatever your position in the school, there's one primary skill you should/must have that marks the difference between mediocrity and Black Belt excellence: The ability to turn the bad into the good.

Before continuing, try this simple exercise: my explanation about turning the bad into the good, please join me in the following exercise.

Replace the term "martial arts" (in your head) with the word "life". Replace "martial artist" with the words "human being."

Try it in the following sentence:

I am training to be a Black Belt in martial arts. My goal is to be a well-rounded, disciplined, focused, compassionate and skilled martial artist.

More on that at the end of this lesson.

A Few Bad-to-Good Strategies

Like the Yin-Yang symbol, with its two equal and yet opposite sides, a martial arts school, no matter its size, age or the record of its leadership, always experiences the good as well as the bad. The two seem to exist in tandem (Yin-Yang).

For example: Johnny comes to class! That's good!

Johnny is 30-minutes late, however. That's bad.

How do we reverse Johnny's "bad" into a "good?" Is Johnny scolded because his mother was faced with excessive traffic on the way to the school? No. Is he denied access to the class? No, instead the master teacher, assistant or leadership team member fits Johnny smoothly, with a smile, into the flow of the class and, perhaps, a little bit of the next one, creating a fun and satisfying experience for Johnny and his tired mother. Nobody's stressed, and a bad becomes a good.

Another example:

Johnny is scheduled to test in a couple of weeks. That's good! We want Johnny to feel like he is progressing. We want him to develop a "Yes, I can" attitude, and as far as we can tell, when Johnny attends his class, he's enthusiastic and interested. Good, good, good!

Johnny has missed, however, a total of eight classes during the last three months, or one-third of the required 24 classes! That's bad!

Johnny must wait, right? You can't overlook those minimum attendance requirements, right? It's a school policy for quality's sake, right? Well, yes and no. First, why did Johnny miss all those classes? Did he practice at home every day he missed a class? Is there an alternative opportunity for Johnny to earn those class credits the program requires?

To turn the bad into the good, the astute teacher digs a little deeper into Johnny's

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situation. In this scenario, Johnny missed classes because his dad was working overtime and couldn't bring him. Johnny practices, but not consistently, so to prepare him for the test and provide him with a way to earn those class credits, you develop a "make-it-good" plan.

First, you record a video, which Johnny can use at home to practice. It includes instructions for what, where, when, how many reps and why. Second, you upload the video to your school's Web site or a social networking site and send Johnny an email with a link to the video (Copy the email to his parents and any other students preparing for the test who need some help and guidance). Johnny receives credit for one (missed) class for every half-hour he practices the video-based training program you created. The results: Johnny practices and improves, he is ready for the test and you've made it much easier for Johnny and you to succeed.

Even if, for whatever reason, Johnny still does not earn all the alternative credits he needs for his pending test, then your energy, attention, caring and work to help him try would not go unrewarded. When there is the will to turn the bad into the good, then there is always a way (and probably four or five ways!).

Another example:

Sam is teaching a class of four- to six-year-olds. It's a packed class, with more than 30 kids on the floor! That's good!

Sam's class assistant hasn't arrived, however, and neither has the front desk person (both delayed by a long line at Starbucks®). That's bad! Sam is alone! Wouldn't you know it, on this particular day, every one of the parents comes to watch the class, so there are 30 kids and 60 parents, one teacher and 15 available seats.

If Sam wasn't an expert at turning the bad into the good, he might have that look of panic on his face, that "I'm stressed" attitude and

demeanor so common to instructors who find themselves in life and death situations—such as this one. Instead, Sam laughs and shakes everyone's hand, hugs a few parents and announces that he has "told the entire staff to leave, so the class could have some real fun!" Sam then selects 15 parent helpers, puts his favorite and most supportive mom behind the front desk to fill that role as best she can, and then teaches one of the most humorous, relaxed, yet enthusiastic, classes of his career.

Sam has obviously learned that, in times of crisis, it's time to relax, change expectations, and recognize the opportunity to create, grow and excel in any situation that is unexpectedly and suddenly different than what we expected. The ability to turn the bad into the good quickly and efficiently is the sign of martial arts mastery.

Team-Training Exercise

Exercise #1: Bad into Good, The Game

Write one "bad" scenario on each of a dozen half-sheets of paper, and then distribute them to your team. Each player will have 60 seconds to read the scenario and prepare to respond with a strategy to turn the bad situation into a "good" outcome.

The player with the best (and most creative, but realistic) response wins _____ (fill in the blank!).

The point of the game, of course, is to train and motivate your team members to think fast on their feet, and learn how to manage those "situations" where positive action is needed to avoid a bad experience for everyone.

Exercise Two: School Owner/Manager/Master Teacher Reading Assignment

Ron Zemke, a customer service expert, has written two excellent books on this subject. If you'd like to become a master of "bad into good," then you'd do well to add them to your management library.

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Service Recovery: Fixing Broken Customers by
Ron Zemke

Coaching Knock Your Socks Off Service by Ron
Zemke and Kristin Anderson

The Main Point

A paraphrase of something Shakespeare wrote is "Nothing is either bad or good, except what our own thinking makes it."

The real lesson of this lesson is that we're not trying to be better "martial arts teachers," we're trying to be better "life" teachers. We're not trying to be better martial artists; instead, our long-term goal is to be better human beings. We're not trying to learn how to turn the bad into the good so that our classes are better. No, we're working on life skills that motivate and allow our students, staff and G.O.L.D. Team members to take all that they learn at the dojo and share it with the rest of the world.

The goal is to learn, during our lives, how to turn the bad into the good. Lucky for us, a martial arts school is the perfect place to develop and practice this most valuable skill.