

Five Tips For Better Teaching, an Acts of Kindness Challenge and Some Cool Leadership Resources

Five Better-Teaching Tips

1. Be the Student

One of the best things about teaching—or assisting in classes—is that the more you put into your students, the more you learn and grow yourself. Don't assume the mistaken perspective that you are simply helping everyone else to learn and grow. Realize that you are often learning as much (or more) than your students. You'll learn and practice patience. Talking about the power of positive thinking will help you to continue to think positively. Being "up" for classes will teach you to manage your energy level. Consistently demonstrating techniques at "level 10" will help you to become more technically proficient.

As a teacher, you should consider your students as equal (or greater than) in status. They are the students—and they are your teachers. Don't teach as if you have all the answers and all the knowledge. Teach as a student of your students. It could be the perfect attitude to have, and make you an immensely more effective teacher/student.

2. Don't Be Stiff and Militaristic; Be Relaxed and Enthusiastic

Don't teach as if you are a boot camp instructor. Yelling at everyone and being "boot-camp mean" won't motivate your students to do more. Being stiff and militaristic may at first seem like the way to start your students "kicking," but, in the end, militarizing your classes only creates distance between you and the people you're trying to inspire. Note: There's a difference between being tough and being mean or abusive.



The better way to teach is to smile, say nice things, encourage your students and let them know that you genuinely care about them. Many Brazilian Jiu Jitsu teachers are some of the best examples of teaching with kindness, despite the fact that they're some of the toughest people on the planet. Carlos Valente, Royce Gracie, Relson and Rorion Gracie, BJ Penn, Cassio Werneck and Charuto Verissimo are teachers with a gentle style of teaching and interacting with students. Their attitude makes training and practice all the more fun and exciting.

Sometimes, the less control you try to exercise over your students, the more actual control you have.

3. Talk Safety, Every Class, and in Almost Every Drill

As a teacher, one of your greatest responsibilities is to help your students avoid being harmed. There should be some dialogue about safety at the beginning of every class ("Is everyone healthy today? If you're nursing an injury, be careful!"), and before nearly every drill ("OK, bend those front knees when you're holding the kicking shield! We want to protect those joints!"). There are some injuries that you can't anticipate, but most can be

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avoided with a little extra attention and safety-talk.

4. Train Very Hard (and Consistently)

There's almost no better way to inspire and motivate people than to be inspired and motivated yourself. As teachers of the martial arts, it's a really good idea to be—and then keep—in the best possible shape. The great martial artist Jhoon Rhee, who, in his 70's, still trains every day, once said, "If it's true that a picture is worth a thousand words, then remember that an action is worth a thousand pictures."

The kind of action you want to take as a martial arts teacher or leader is "martial arts action." Train hard, train consistently, and you will be ten times the leader. This is known as "leading by example."

5. Leave "the Dojo and Enter the World"

It's easy, when you are a new martial arts teacher, to measure your teaching proficiency, according to your martial arts skills. "Look, look how good I am! I know what I'm doing! I'm a good teacher!" That changes with time. Next, you think that your students become the proof that you are a good teacher. Your students' martial arts skills, their ability to "kick" and win trophies and/or demonstrate excellent technique, is how you measure your worth as a teacher. "Look how good my students are! Look at them kick! Look at their skills! You see; I AM a good teacher!"

Eventually, the measurement changes again. You may think your teaching proficiency is based on your school and it's size, both in square footage and student count. "Look, I have a 5,000-square foot school and 600 active students!"

That phase, too, will pass. When the wisdom of your life-long martial arts experience finally reveals itself, you are apt to realize that it isn't your skills or the physical skills of your students or the size of your school that

indicates you're a successful teacher; no, it's something altogether different. Your success as a teacher will be measured not by what happens in your dojo, but by what happens outside of it.

You shouldn't consider yourself a "successful" teacher until you see the philosophy of the martial arts, all of those wonderful concepts you practice so diligently on the mat (focus, concentration, courage, perseverance, etc.), manifest themselves in your students lives OUTSIDE your school. They may be "masters" on the mat, but if the ideas and skills aren't being applied in the "real world," then you haven't yet done your best work.

The Challenge: Kindness Day

Just for fun—and because it's a good idea—host a KINDNESS DAY for your staff and leadership team members. Pick a day next week, and have a contest among your team to see who can perform, and log, the most acts of kindness from sunup until sundown. Provide a noteworthy prize for the student who records the most kind acts.

The point of this exercise is to see what focusing on kindness does to the students performing them. It's also to see what effect doing acts of kindness has on the students and your school.

Record those acts of kindness in a notebook or in your day planner.

Cool Leadership and Teaching-Resource Web Sites

Visit these three Web sites, which are packed with teaching and leadership ideas: 30hourfamine.org, myfootprint.org and salsa.net/peace.