

Woods's Top 16 Reasons Why Students Stop Attending

In the June and July 1993 editions of INSIDE KARATE, Andrew Wood, an early advocate of enhancing martial arts businesses claims that the top 16 reasons why students quit are as follows: (1) classes are not fun, (2) teaching is too impersonal, (3) classes are too technical, (4) classes are too long and students [have to] come too often, (5) fear of injury, (6) lack of positive feedback, (7) lack of tangible rewards, (8) assistant instructors are not as good as head instructors, (9) poor class scheduling, (10) teacher's pets, (11) instructor star syndrome, (12) training methods are unsuitable for today's market, (13) mixed belt levels in group classes, (14) the instructor does not speak the same language, (15) poor testing procedures, (16) too much emphasis on tournaments.

A lot has changed since 1993. To Mr. Woods's point, most of these "flaws" have been addressed, but for the most part, at least in this writer's humble opinion, they have been addressed at a high cost. And some contradict others. Let's go over them a little at a time.

• **Classes are not fun, too impersonal, too technical (1, 2, & 3)**

One can make a good case for teaching classes to the general public that are more fun than those that would be taught to professional warriors. That probably means making them less militaristic thus more personal. Fair enough. But if, in making classes more comfortable, an instructor makes them less technical, then what is he teaching? Students tend to hate drill classes (classes not fun), but they also dislike technical classes. This suggests that to retain students, an instructor must spoon feed them pabulum while claiming to offer a broad menu.

• **Classes are too long or students have to come too often; assistant instructors are not as good as head instructors, classes are poorly scheduled; the instructor does not speak the same language (4, 8, & 9, 14)**

That classes take time (#4), is an extension of classes are not fun (#1). While the pabulum is being fed, the students are saying, please don't force-feed us. Okay, says the instructor, I'll redo the schedule and have more classes at various times. Students live busy lives, so it is understandable that they cannot come often or spend too long in classes before catching a meal and a good night's sleep. So, by addressing "classes are too long", the instructor also addresses #9, classes are poorly scheduled. However, in order to create classes at various times, the instructor must employ assistants that naturally will be less skilled than he. Wait a minute! Why would students care about the skill of the instructor if they do not simultaneously care about the details of the techniques being taught (see #3)? And how can they complain about an assistant's skill if the head instructor they want to teach them, can't communicate in their language (#14)?

• **Lack of tangible rewards; training methods are unsuitable for today's market; mixed belt levels in group classes (7, 12 & 13)**

Okay, let's modernize the training methods. One modern method might be to have separate classes for each belt level. But, doesn't that require less qualified instructors to teach? What does "unsuitable training methods" mean? I suspect it means take it easy on us, but still manage to train us, and give us frequent tangible rewards!

It seems that puts us back to square one, back to reasons 1, 2, 3, 4, 8, 9, 12, 13 and 14, above.

More about the 16 Reasons next time.