

DEPORTMENT IN THE DOJO

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Having been involved in the martial arts for over half a century, I have had many experiences in my own dojo and in the clubs of many other instructors. I have always been impressed with the fact that one of the few places left in modern society where discipline and respect are required of everyone from the instructor to the most recent beginning student is in the martial arts. This is shown in the bowing upon entering the dojo, upon stepping onto or off of the mat, or practice area in a dojo for a style that does not use mats, to the kamiza in a dojo that has one, and definitely to one another before, during, and after a training session of whatever nature. Martial arts "warriors" are constantly admonished to be peaceful, though vigilant. It is consistently emphasized that the martial arts are for DEFENSE ONLY, not aggression. Accordingly, a martial arts student is always expected to be polite to everyone, and every style I have studied or observed expresses a code of conduct that requires cooperation and concern for one another in every aspect of martial arts endeavor, including competition.

Every soke (founder) of a martial art of whom I have knowledge, stressed this necessity, not only in the dojo, but as an intrinsic part of the core philosophy of the art! I have had many great models on which to pattern my activity and belief in the martial arts. Such individuals are admirable, and I have nothing but the greatest respect for them.

Unfortunately, there is, of course, another side to this issue. When I see in any dojo stronger students being allowed to bully weaker students with show-off technique or just plain greater strength, it is very disturbing. When I see students being impolite to one another, or anyone else in the dojo, it is also disturbing. What do such individuals think all the bowing is about? Disrespectful behavior or impolite language is antithetical to the spirit of budo and against every principle of conduct of every martial art I have experienced. It is hypocritical to bow in pretended respect and then be impolite to, much less bully, another individual in the dojo. What would one of the founders or Any one of the arts think of such a profanation?

No, a dojo is not a church or other religious building, a temple of any kind. However, it is somewhat hallowed by its purpose. The discipline that prevents perversion of what we do there is lessened by, and threatened by, such behavior or language. Whether bullying is allowed or not, four-letter expletives used in a dojo setting exudes a stench that all the incense some clubs use in the dojo cannot sweeten. Especially when an INSTRUCTOR, whether the head sensei or an assistant, uses such language to get across a point about a technique or whatever, it has more than one adverse consequence. First of all, such four-letter, often scatological, verbiage has been so overused in print, on stage, and on film for so long that they have become overused in ordinary street conversation to the point where they have ceased to have even much shock value any longer. So the excuse that they get to the point will not wash. Yet, such expressions are NOT polite. By design, they are IMPOLITE, the opposite of the requirement in the code of Bushido, or any other conduct code in the martial arts. Yes, perhaps the person using such language is not consciously trying to be offensive, or even aware that such language offends anyone, but it does. They also exhibit a LACK of discipline absolutely requisite to even safety in the dojo!

It takes as many repetitions, as much labour, to form a bad habit as to form a good habit. Bad language, bullying behavior of any kind, constitutes bad habit. Even as children, most of us had little games played for the sole purpose of changing a bad habit into a better one. For instance there was the old schoolyard game of a person having to donate a nickle (or quarter or whatever) to some good cause for every slip of using a four-letter word in any conversation. This well might not either work, or even be appropriate, in the dojo. But some method of regaining a strict discipline is essential.

Ultimately, I hold myself, as sensei, responsible, not only for my own words and conduct in the dojo, but that of every student and guest who sets foot in my class. My first attempt to steel the discipline is to absolutely refuse to tolerate either misconduct or inappropriate verbiage in my students. They do not see such behavior in me, nor hear such language coming out of my mouth, and they never will, nor will either be permitted in my class.

I named my club BUSHIDO because I believe in the code, and I intend to enforce in my class every single point of Bushido every class period, and beyond. I cannot hold my students to this code if I do not myself UPHOLD it by both my words and conduct. We stand as models for, especially, younger participants, most especially children. As a career teacher, in academics as well as martial arts, I know from experience that students will learn more in an instant from my behavior than in months of my verbiage. If my conduct does not exhibit my instruction, what my students will learn from me will at some point be a far cry from what my lesson purports to teach. My words also teach, but if my lesson's words are not enforced by my conversation's words, I am forsworn, and my lesson is, at best, corrupted. At the same time, if the student does not follow the discipline, no matter how well the instructor exhibits it, the student has broken the contract, and must be brought to heel, made to adjust either behavior or language, or both.

To conclude, I mean no offense to anyone with this reflection. I love the martial arts, and believe in the philosophy that underlies the martial arts. All of us have to decide our own path to our destinations, but also take the consequences of how we proceed on that path. If our martial art practice is not more than constant repetition of

techniques, is it not just a fancy dance without purpose, object, or, therefore, value? Martial arts practice can turn boys and girls into men and women---or monsters, depending on the path's narrow straightness or crooked width. Which is worth our effort?