



Life Lessons From Martial Arts Masters

I just wanted to write you a quick note to express appreciation for your subscription to our Life Lessons From Martial Arts Masters newsletter.

As a parent, I'm sure you know how it feels to see your child succeed at something hard. Nothing is more rewarding.

I suspect you also know how discouraging and frustrating it is when your child isn't making good progress. You know, doing his or her best and following through – whether it's in schoolwork, athletics, or just being a responsible family member.

The most important school for any child is the home, but sometimes kids simply need the reinforcement that comes from another person or place.

A big part of our mission is teaching Life Lessons to children of all ages, by providing them with positive life experiences. Years of teaching martial arts to children have given us many excellent strategies for motivating kids to set goals, keep trying, follow through, and do their best.

We've seen remarkable changes in children of all ages due to our efforts and we are proud of the positive impact we've had.

This newsletter is our attempt to share some of what we've found to work. As a subscriber, once a week you'll receive an email from us with an idea, case example, or other information we hope provides you with some value.

We hope you enjoy our Life Lessons From Martial Arts Masters newsletter.



Life Lessons Introduction

Thanks again for subscribing to our weekly Life Lessons From Martial Arts Masters email.

As I said in the email you received shortly after subscribing, our mission is to teach children Life Lessons by providing them with positive learning experiences.

The experiences we provide are designed to help kids learn the value of:

- * focus and discipline
- * hard work and commitment towards a goal
- * positive interactions with peers

In teaching these Life Lessons over the years, we've learned a lot about what motivates kids to excel, and what undermines their motivation.

And, we have found that sharing our knowledge with parents offers some unique insight they often can't get from another source. It was that discovery which compelled us to develop this newsletter.

I sincerely hope you gain value from your subscription.

In the next newsletter, which will arrive in about a week, I'll share my first Life Lesson.



Positive Labeling

Ever wish that your child would make the choice to do something harder than take the easy way out?

I repeatedly hear this concern from parents.

Well, after years of working with kids, we have developed some very successful strategies to get the very best out of children.

In this and the next two newsletters, I'll describe three of these strategies.

The underlying goal with all of our Life Lessons is to get children to develop the motivation from within to want to do the right thing.

Strategy #1 is POSITIVE LABELING

For example, if we want our children to do good push-ups our instructors might say:

"I know you are really strong! Can you show me 10 good push-ups."

In other words, we label the child the way we want them to perform.

How can you apply this strategy? You might say to your child:

"I know you like a real challenge and are smart, why don't you ask for that extra credit work in school."

POSITIVE LABELING — it helps us get the most out of our children and, if you aren't already using this strategy, I'm sure it will help you.



Positive Self Labeling

Last time I told you how we use POSITIVE LABELING as one of our strategies to get the most out of children in our classes.

Our parents use this strategy also with great results.

Are you continuously looking for opportunities to POSITIVELY LABEL your child?

In this newsletter, I want to tell you about the second of the three strategies we frequently use.

Strategy #2 is POSITIVE SELF LABELING

For example, we might ask the entire class:

“Who wants to be strong?” (kids all raise their hand)

“Who wants big muscles?” (kids all raise their hands).

“Who wants a super strong hand technique?” (kids raise their hands)

“Well if you want these things than you are going to have to do push-ups. Show me your ten best push-ups.”

In other words, we let our children label themselves with a goal and then we show them out to accomplish it.

How can you apply this strategy? You might say to your child:

“You want to be smart?” (yep, your child says) “You want good grades?” (yep, your child says). “Then, getting all your homework done is going to be very important.”

POSITIVE SELF LABELING – it works for us and it will work for you.



What's In It For Me?

Last time I told you how we use POSITIVE SELF LABELING to get the most out of the children in our classes.

In this newsletter, I want to describe:

Strategy #3 – WHAT'S IN IT FOR ME

For example, our instructors might say,

“Who wants to get to the next level in martial arts?” (kids all raise their hand)

“Well, if you do, you are going to have to learn this new martial arts move and I will give you a sticker when you do.”

In other words, we let our children set a goal for themselves and then we tell them how and offer an award if they accomplish the goal set.

How can you apply this strategy? You might say to your child:

“Do you want good grades” (yep, your child says)

“Well, if you do, you should ask for extra credit at school. That will give you a better shot at good grades and you can get extra play time (or some other family incentive).

Just make sure your child knows WHAT'S IN IT FOR THEM.

In this and the last two newsletters, I've shared three strategies we use to get the most out of our children. I hope you have found this information valuable.

In the next newsletter, I'm going to discuss how to help your child make the right choices in life.



Making Good Choices

In the last three newsletters, I've shared three strategies we use to get the most out of the children in our martial arts classes.

In this newsletter, I want to discuss a concern we frequently hear from parents about making the right choice. They ask:

"If someone asks my child to do drugs (or some other harmful activity), will he or she make the right choice?"

Well, in my years of experience in working with children of all ages, I've found there are two key determinants to children making the right choice.

Level of Self-Confidence and Self-Esteem

Children with the highest level of self-confidence and self-esteem will always make the right choices because they will not wilt under peer pressure. That's why martial arts places so much emphasis on developing children in this area.

The Personal Standards Others Have For Them

We've learned that children generally live up to whatever standard we expect of them. Within martial arts we use the level of "black belt" as a way to communicate the standards we expect. For example, we label our black belt achievers as the children who never give up, do their best, are always honest and are the most respectful.

We encourage our parents to work as hard as we do in building their child's self-esteem and setting high standards.

For example, related to education, we have some parents who expect a master's degree from all of their children and, to no one's surprise, that's what ends up happening.

Kids will live up to the image they have of themselves and the adults in their life have of them – and, if that image is a positive one, they will always make the right choices in life.



Positive Praise First

Over the course of these past four weeks, I've shared our school's strategies for positively motivating children to do their best.

In this newsletter, I want to discuss a common mistake that I've seen other teachers and parents sometimes make along the way. In their desire to help children do their very best, they offer "constructive criticism" right from the very beginning.

However, if children hear praise first, they are much more willing to keep improving. We train our instructors to seek the positives first, to be "good finders." Once they praise our students for their efforts, they share ways to improve upon their technique.

So it sounds like this: "I like the way you kicked. Now if you turn your foot this would be better. Great! Now do it ten more times just like that!"

Instead of being guarded and defensive, the child is motivated by the praise to try again.

I also see this with parents. They love their child and want them to do so well that they first correct their child instead of first praising them for their efforts. This minor tweak will really boost your child's desire to be the best.

Our instructors call this, "Praise, Correct, Praise and Challenge."

I hope this helps. To see my instructors in action, stop by our school and watch how well students respond to our successful style of teaching.



Create The Mood For Motivation

Last week I shared our school's technique for motivating students to try harder, which we call "Praise, Correct, Praise and Challenge." In this newsletter, I want to offer some insight into the importance of setting the atmosphere.

But first, let me ask you a question: When you were a kid, when did you ask your parents for money? When they were in a good mood, of course! You knew they'd be more receptive and generous if they were feeling happy.

We do the same thing with students, setting a positive atmosphere and reaping positive results.

To do this, we make sure our school is an upbeat place to be. I tell my instructors that as leaders in my school, we are in the business of creating a mood for learning and being the best.

Stated very simply, we want to project a positive spirit and set the stage to make sure students are inspired to learn.

As parents, you know that being positive around your children will always make them strive to be the best. As we mentioned in previous newsletters, students are motivated by praise and encouragement.

When students and families walk in the door, we greet one another with a bow and a smile. From the moment they step foot into the school, they know they will be treated with positive encouragement.

Therefore, they do not fear being ridiculed for trying. They do not fear failure because they know they will be encouraged to keep going even when the going is tough.

By creating a positive, upbeat mood, we have found that students don't fear trying new things, even if they are difficult. They know they are in a positive place.



Keeping Kids Tuned In and On Track

Over the course of six weeks, I've outlined my school's methods for motivating students and offered tips for establishing a positive, motivating atmosphere for children.

I hope you've tried some of these techniques at home and found them to be as successful there as we find them to be.

Next, I'd like to share with you a secret that we use to hold students' attention. It's almost like the old adage about catching more flies with honey than with vinegar: Ask, don't shout.

Everyone likes to be asked to do something, not always told to do so. I like to tell my instructors that in order to get the kids to practice on their own or to always use their best technique, they should try asking instead of commanding.

For example, we can say, "Johnny, can you do your kicks," or we can scream, "JOHNNY! DO YOUR KICKS!" Both get the same result, but the first one is more pleasing to deal with.

Besides, if I constantly am shouting orders, I see that my students begin to tune me out. It is always better to get kids to comply with a question.

That's not to say we don't sometimes demand action. But we do mix it up because constantly demanding is overbearing. We want students to realize that we want them to do their best and that sometimes means we have to ask.

When we give them our best, they respond by giving us their best in return.



Consistency Is Important For Kids

Over the course of the past couple of months, I've outlined my school's methods for motivating students and offered tips for establishing a positive, encouraging atmosphere for children.

I hope you've tried some of these techniques at home and found them to be as successful there as we find them to be in our martial arts schools.

Next, I'd like to share with you the proven method that we use to structure our lessons. We find that it helps quickly children settle into class and focus on the subject.

It is, very simply, the use of repetition and routine.

When children come to martial arts class, after a long day at school, they know exactly what to expect: Class starts with a series of stretches, then moves into some drills. They know to expect this structure, and it helps them clear their mind and move into the more challenging portion of the lesson.

By the time they are warmed up, they're feeling confident – they've been doing what's familiar and comfortable to them – and are ready to learn something new.

The routines and structure we use in martial arts classes have been proven to help children focus – martial arts are commonly recommended for children with A.D.H.D. because of our solid structure and clearly stated expectations.

To bring this principle into your home, why not rethink the routines you have with your children. Have you put into place structured routines for bedtime, chores, and homework? These are perfect opportunities to bring order to your child's day.



Consistency For Kids, Part II

Last week, I talked about how we use routines and structure in our martial arts classes to help our students develop their ability to focus.

That's why martial arts is commonly recommended for children with A.D.H.D.

I encourage you to strengthen the routines and patterns you have with your children.

Having this structure helps them establish a solid footing in their work.

Good teachers at school use these same techniques – they start the day with a consistent routine and then utilize an established class format throughout the day.

Now let's move on to the topic of repetition, another important keystone in learning martial arts.

Parents certainly know how repetition appeals to children: How many times have you read the same bedtime story over and over? Children crave routines and patterns that help them feel secure.

Learning and mastering patterns is essential in the martial arts. In order to progress to the next belt or rank, one must memorize a form (also called "kata").

Because these forms progress in difficulty, they help sharpen focus and build concentration. Once a student has mastered their form, they have a great sense of confidence and enthusiasm as their skills progress.

The importance of learning through rhythms and patterns is very often overlooked in our modern lives. Our society sometimes urges us to let go of the old and constantly move onto the newest and most exciting toy, blockbuster movie or gadget.

Help and encourage your child to understand and value the importance of repetition and structure in their lives. Let them hold onto old favorites, enjoy their favorite meal and yes, read that bedtime story to them one more time.



Making Learning Relevant

Over the course of the past few months, I've outlined my school's methods for motivating students and offered tips for establishing routines and structure for children. I hope you've tried some of these techniques at home and found them to be as successful there as we find them to be.

Next, I'd like to share with you how we approach real-life issues and make them relevant to children. We find that it helps children appreciate how these issues might affect them someday. As martial artists, we place high expectations on our students' behavior and expect them to know how to conduct themselves in difficult situations.

We believe that martial arts classes give us an opportunity to discuss with children the sometimes thorny issues that touch their lives – from safety and stranger awareness to peer pressure and dealing with bullies.

That is the first important step: To recognize the opportunity. Parents wanting to discuss these issues with their children must make opportunities to do the same.

Next, we discuss the issue with the children and provide them with solid guidelines on how to behave in the situation.

Finally, to drive home the point, we do role-playing exercises.

Try discussing these issues with children – these topics are perfect for heart-to-heart discussions in the car or at the dinner table. Here are just a few discussion starters:

* "Let's say I'm your friend and I just found a pack of cigarettes. I want you to come smoke with me. What would you do?"

* "I'm the class bully and I just shoved you really hard. What should you do?"

* "I'm a stranger in a car and am asking you to help me find my puppy. What now?"

You'll find that making time for these topics will make for fruitful discussions.



Looking Toward the Future

Over the course of the past few months, I've outlined my school's methods for educating children; last week I discussed how to make learning relevant to your children.

I hope you've tried some of these techniques at home and found them to be as successful there as we find them to be in our martial arts schools. Next, I'd like to share with you our goals for our students. These goals go far beyond achieving a black belt. They extend into the very way children will conduct their lives.

From the moment that students step onto the mat, they know we place high expectations on their behavior. They bow to one another and the instructors. They address instructors as "Sir" and "Ma'am." We expect them to adhere to a code of conduct at home, one that places high value on respect and taking care of one's self and surroundings. We offer incentives, such as patches, to reward good behavior.

As parents know, placing these expectations on children will help these achievements become lifelong habits. Manners, respect, courtesy, and pride in their appearance are characteristics that lead to long-term success.

We've identified these qualities as ones important for our students to take into the future. As a parent, consider the qualities you would like your children to learn.

Once you've identified the character traits of value to you, ensure that the extracurricular activities you chose for your children reflect your commitment to their future.



The Look of Confidence

For some time now, I've given you some insights into how my school motivates and inspires students. I hope you've used some of our principles to enact positive changes in your child's behavior, attitude, and self-concept.

This week, I want to tell you about one of the very most important qualities a child must have in order to succeed.

Confidence.

Although we sometimes talk about confidence as something people "have," confidence actually involves a very specific set of behaviors.

As part of our martial arts classes, we break down these specific behaviors and discuss them often.

These qualities include:

- * Great posture
- * Good eye contact
- * A loud and clear voice

Identifying these traits as desirable is the first step. As I mentioned before, children need a clear set of expectations that they must know to follow.

Over the course of the next few weeks, I'll offer tips on how to help your child build these confidence skills.

In the meantime, pay attention and see if your child has these traits mentioned above. Praise them whenever you see them show their confidence skills!



Stand Up Straight!

Have you noticed a change in how your child displays his or her confidence? Last week I detailed the skills involved in projecting greater confidence.

They included having great posture, maintaining eye contact, and speaking with a loud and clear voice.

Identifying these qualities and praising your child when they use these skills is a good start along the path of greater self-confidence.

The next step is to use positive labeling to help them recognize the importance of the goal. For example, in class I'd say:

"Black belts have their backs straight and chests out. You do want to become a black belt, don't you?"

Or,

"I know you are good looking, so let's accentuate it!"

Or, even point out the negative:

"When you're slouching like that your posture looks so weak and I know that's not the case. You are a strong person, so back straight and chest out. Go!"

Stating the issue, explaining its importance and giving children a clear directive will help children understand the link – in this case, that standing up straight makes them project the look of confidence.



Eye Contact is Key

An important Life Lesson for children to learn is how to have the physical skills that show self-confidence.

They included having great posture, maintaining eye contact, and speaking with a loud and clear voice. Last week, I suggested some ways to help you work with your child to improve his or her posture.

In this newsletter, I will stress the importance of good eye contact. In our martial arts classes, we demand that our students look us in the eye when we are talking to them.

If a child looks away, I stop talking and remind him or her to look at me.

Or, I make light of it and say, "That must have been a good-looking boy (or girl) who just walked past!"

If the problem persists, I mirror the behavior and say, "Imagine if I was talking to you and I kept looking away like this (talk, keeping eyes on the ground). Funny, isn't it? So let's not do it."

Parents, tell your children specifically how you want them to behave and have them live up to it. Otherwise, children do not know how - or understand why - they must act in a certain way.



You Are What You Sound Like!

Over the course of the past few months, I've outlined my school's methods for motivating students, and lately, I've offered tips to help your child project the look of confidence.

These specific qualities include having great posture, maintaining eye contact, and speaking with a loud and clear voice.

This Life Lesson is one we reinforce within class time and time again. It is an important skill for students of martial arts to possess.

This is the trait of projecting confidence using a loud, clear voice.

Students hear me repeat one phrase all the time, and all of our instructors tell students the same thing:

"You are what you sound like!"

When student are asked their names, our students know to respond loudly. They say, for example, "Scott, Sir!"

"Here's why: A martial art student and future Black Belt sounds like a leader, loud and clear.

If a student mutters and doesn't answer with enough gusto, we ask them:

"Do you want to be a leader and a Black Belt?"

Of course, the student responds with a yes.

We tell them to introduce themselves again until they sound like a leader.

We give students very specific directions on how to look and sound confident. That way, they can begin to sound confident and believe in themselves. It is an important step in helping children build self-confidence.



Start Small, Aim High

Lately, I've devoted these Life Lessons newsletters to the importance of sounding and acting confident. I hope the tips are giving you a strategy for helping your child project good confidence.

It is our experience in our martial arts schools that when we start to build a child's confidence, that self-assuredness builds and gains momentum.

The best way to start your child on this path upward is to start by giving him or her small, relatively attainable goals.

For example, in the beginning, we teach children very easy kicking techniques to master. The first few belts in our school are relatively easy to attain.

We do not make the bar high in the beginning because we want the children to build positive momentum, to give them confidence in their ability to learn martial arts.

As they are learning techniques, they earn stripes and rewards for accomplishing their goals. As they progress, they are invited to test for their next color belt.

Parents can incorporate this principle at home by not demanding much in the beginning. Build up to it and the children will naturally be confident to take on harder challenges.

Try this: Have your child do the easiest homework assignments first. Celebrate this accomplishment. Then move on to the more difficult tasks, so they can tackle the challenges with greater confidence.



Good Discipline, Good Parenting

Until now, these reports have focused on motivating children and building their confidence to help bring about success. I've shared my insights and explained how we motivate and build success in our schools.

Now, I want to shift the focus to discipline, an essential trait for parents and children alike.

I find that parents sometimes shy away from the topic of discipline because too often, we associate discipline with the act of reprimanding a child for bad behavior. Scolding, punishing, getting angry – that's how we tend to think of discipline.

Unfortunately so. Because having a positive attitude toward discipline can help that child learn to internalize structure and walk the path toward an achievement-oriented life.

So forget scolding and punishing. When you think about discipline, consider the positives:

It takes discipline to save money for big goals, like a new bike.

Practice makes perfect – and that takes discipline.

New privileges come only when a child is disciplined enough to have good behavior on a long-term basis.

Our martial arts school is well known for our emphasis on high standards and good discipline. In fact, we often call our school the “Academy of Discipline.”

We have identified good discipline as a priority for our students and we all work hard to build discipline.

Stay tuned for more information and techniques you can try at home to encourage good discipline with your child. In the meantime, reconsider your attitude toward discipline. It's an important skill for life.



Discipline Is Ready

As I mentioned in the previous report, the importance of good discipline is the topic we are now setting our focus upon.

You now know that discipline is a principle that should guide all of us, including adults. It is not an understatement to say that good discipline empowers us to enjoy health and happiness.

Working hard, doing our best, eating right and living well all require a healthy sense of self-discipline.

The strategies we are discussing in these reports focus on instilling self-discipline in children, but they can easily be adapted to bringing about a healthier sense of self-discipline for adults, too.

Two things are necessary to bring about better self-discipline and instill discipline in a child: A vision for success and enough time and patience to turn those improvements into a long-term reality.

Having said this, it is important to make it clear that until a child has a solid sense of responsibility and discipline, it is a parent's job to set goals and pave the pathway for their child.

That doesn't mean you need to be extra harsh or strict; it simply requires a goal for the future and the patient guidance to help them see it through.

As martial artists, we set the goal of achieving a black belt for all of our students. For parents and students who make this a priority, we can make it happen.



Discipline 101

Over the last few weeks, I've encouraged you to rethink your approach to discipline and consider the many benefits that come with improved self-discipline.

Now you're likely wondering how you can modify your parenting methods to bring about a change.

In the last report, I emphasized the importance of identifying goals and having both the vision and pathway to success.

Here are some strategies to use at home:

1. Have a consistent routine – If the child's expectations are consistent, they have an easier time knowing automatically what needs to be done.
2. Establish clear limits – and stick to your rules. Children who know they have a line they cannot cross are less likely to waste their time testing your limits.
3. Offer guidance and praise – help them along the way! Stay in communication with their teachers, for example, and work together to help your child be successful in school. And once in a while, splurge and reward your child for a job well done!
4. Set a good example – make sure you are modeling healthy self-discipline. Particularly when it comes to self-discipline, your actions will speak louder than your words.

These techniques are based upon the principles we practice in martial arts classes. Goals, routines, and encouragement are ingrained in our curriculum – and so is discipline.

Put these principles into practice and see the effects of good discipline. We do in our martial arts schools, every class and every day.



Improving Every Day

Recently, we delved into the topic of discipline and are ready to explain in greater detail how we cultivate discipline in our martial arts academies.

I am sharing these strategies with you with the hope that you can establish and promote more positive discipline habits in your home.

We've already discussed the importance of making discipline a positive quality to embody. Setting goals and working at them bit by bit gives your child a steady path toward accomplishment.

In the martial arts, we place high expectations upon our students (ultimately, we want them to achieve black belt status), but we realize this mighty task takes time and encouragement.

We work hard to encourage and motivate the lower-ranking students. We set goals that are readily achievable to help them internalize what's necessary for success. (you do the same thing when you put structures and routines in place to help your child know what needs to be accomplished, such as setting the bed and having a specific time and place for doing homework).

As our students progress in rank and skill level, more of the responsibility gets transferred to them. They are expected to:

- * Be able to teach what they've already learned
- * Lead some of our routines, such as warm-ups
- * Act as mentors to lower-ranking students.

As their self-discipline grows, so does the level of responsibility.

Let me mention here that students are praised and awarded for their accomplishments; this is an important aspect of the positive self-discipline we work to promote.

We work through a variety of incentives, from stickers to exclusive parties and elite teams. Yes, good discipline is an expectation, but it is one that we never fail to notice and praise.



Modeling Good Habits

Lately, our discussion has focused on the importance of self-discipline and how to build and encourage this very important trait in your child.

Now that we recognize the steps that it takes – setting goals, helping them along the path, giving them time and encouragement. It's time to take our focus off the child and turn it inward.

Please answer this question: Are you modeling good self-discipline?

More than likely, your answer is both yes and no. Everyone has strengths and weaknesses and even as adults, we have habits that call for improvement – clutter and disorganization, overindulging or watching too much TV.

Your quest to put your child on the path to self-discipline will ring truer if you also identify an area for improvement and work toward that goal, too.

Your dedication toward self-betterment is sending an important message to your child, namely, that self-discipline and working toward important goals isn't a concept that disappears after childhood.

Surely, none of us are perfect. Even as martial masters, we continue to set goals and work toward personal improvement. Getting a black belt isn't the end of a journey, it's the start of a new chapter. Our instructors are all students; we're all working to get better and better along the way.

Our students have great respect for our knowledge because they recognize the fact that martial arts is a lifelong quest for betterment.

Make a goal, conquer a weakness and you and your child can commit to greater self-discipline for life.



Discipline: A Trait For All

Over the course of the past couple of months, I've outlined my school's methods for bringing out the best in children. In my last Life Lesson, I asked you to not just look at your child's behavior, but to also assess YOUR level of self-discipline.

Then, I explained how essential it is that a parent journey toward greater self-discipline alongside his or her child.

Have you thought about the positive message this sends to your child, and better still, have you identified self-discipline as a goal of your own?

There is a Latin proverb that goes, "Practice is the best master," and this is true when it comes to a person's behavior, within the context of martial arts and in their everyday life.

A desire to change their own behavior is one reason that adults join martial arts along with their child. It is as fulfilling for adults to revisit their lifestyle and set themselves on the path toward a healthy, holistic way of living as it is for them to witness this transformation in their child.

Too often, adults become entrenched in their habits and set in their ways - we're not called "creatures of habit" for nothing. Years can go by before we realize we have let ourselves go soft, physically, mentally or both.

P.S. Embarking upon a martial arts program can bring about a new attitude, a fresh perspective, and increased wellness. Consider martial arts as a family activity, one that can bring about a change for the better, day by day, step by step.



Powerfully Positive Thinking

In the previous installment of this newsletter, I discussed the importance of self-discipline for children and stressed that this life skill not just be one for children, that adults can reap great benefits from strengthening their self-discipline as well.

Then, I suggested that you consider embarking upon a martial arts program as a family – for your sake and for your child also.

If you're anything like the countless other parents I've spoken with, your first response was one of disbelief. Maybe you've never considered yourself an athlete, let alone a martial artist.

Why not?

Wait, don't answer that. I've already heard every reason in the book. Too out-of-shape. Not enough time. Too tired. It's too difficult.

But for every excuse I've heard, I've also witnessed a hundred changes for the better, people who have set aside their reservations and started along the way to self-improvement through martial arts.

Whether or not you opt to begin a martial arts program, do spend some time thinking about your own attitude. Do you model can-do behavior for your child, or are you telegraphing fears that disable you – and perhaps your child – from your aspirations?

Making a change for the better is the first step toward better living. Believe in yourself, and you can make it happen.



Mind Over Attitude

Over the course of the past few weeks, I've outlined my school's methods for motivating students and encouraged you to improve your child's self-discipline, as well as your own.

Because of our proven success in the lives of countless adults and children, I've suggested martial arts as a vehicle for your family's improvement. The principles we practice in class have larger relevance for children in school, for adults in the work-place and for families at home.

Where do you start? With a positive mental attitude, of course.

It was American industrialist Henry Ford who once said, "There is no man living who isn't capable of doing more than he thinks he can do." Our potential is limited only by the constraints we put upon ourselves.

The sky's the limit, as long as you aim high.

It's something we tell our children, as we look to the future, but I find that adults don't apply this same positive thinking to their own experiences. Whether they're stuck in a rut or enmeshed in bad habits, they don't see how their particular situation can be improved.

One of the first things we have our new students do, regardless of their age, is to break a wooden board with their hand or foot. This is a good way to experience the enabling feeling that comes from doing martial arts.

It's also a powerful metaphor about overcoming obstacles and breaking through barriers. It is the first of many triumphs that will come your way.



What's In It For You?

Over the course of the past couple of months, I've outlined the strategies we use to cultivate excellence among students at our martial arts school.

While I've focused much of my comments on children, I've recently begun to explain the many benefits for adults who start martial arts training.

As you recall, my first suggestion is to encourage you to enable yourself by having a positive mental outlook. Remember when I talked about labeling children as future black belts so that they can envision themselves in that role?

This same principle applies to adults, too. Positive thinking is the only way we can reach our goals, regardless of age.

Here are some other ways martial arts can benefit you:

- * Better physical stamina. Physical training will give you increased stamina, more energy, less tiredness and promote weight loss.
- * Better concentration. The drills and forms we repeat allow for better concentration. And, because your body is in better condition, your mind is able to focus better.
- * Better self-confidence. You're along the path toward a better life, and you know it. That feeling is powerfully good.



Do It Together

I hope you've taken some of my suggestions on how to incorporate our martial arts success principles into your daily life. The strategies can be applied to promote excellence in all aspects of life, particularly home and school.

It is my experience that children and their parents are most successful when they are all "on the same page," working toward a common goal that they all hold to be important.

I have suggested you consider martial arts as a family activity, because of the many benefits for adults as well as children.

I haven't yet talked about the most compelling reason of all to join your children in a program.

Here it is ... participating in an activity - whether it is martial arts, another sport or a craft - Is fun, enriching and relationship strengthening.

Sharing the ups and downs, supporting one another and celebrating your many victories is an experience to treasure. You've heard it from so many people, to savor the time you have together - here's one way to make the most of your moments as a family.

It is a journey toward self-betterment that will give your children the attitude they need for success in life - and will give you the chance to look inward and make improvements of your own.

This future, your future, looks bright.



Putting It All Together

Through these Life Lessons, I hope you've gained some insight into the teachings and practices that make martial arts an inspiration to so many people around the world.

It has been my hope that you have recognized the connection between the martial arts practices and the principles that give them meaning

Here are some of the concepts that have been detailed in this series of Life Lessons:

- * Having a solid structure in place, through repetition and routine, helps build a sense of comfort and confidence.
- * High expectations should be clearly communicated, and the pathway to achievement should be equally clear. Reward with praise and incentives at every step along the path.
- * Self-confidence should be stressed, through a child's actions and physical behavior.
- * Self-discipline is a trait that enables a child to achieve a higher standard of behavior, handle a greater amount of responsibility and therefore earn more privileges.
- * Having a positive mental attitude and setting goals are principles that go hand-in-hand.

These nuggets of wisdom are certainly not exclusive to martial arts. But they are the principles that guide our teaching. We strive for excellence – that's why it is called a "black belt attitude."



A Look At Lessons Learned

For about seven months now, these Life Lessons have appeared in your inbox. You've read them and hopefully, they've given you some food for thought, some pause for reflection upon how to help your child achieve excellence.

That, in essence, is what we do in martial arts – we help students in their quest for excellence. We motivate, we encourage and ultimately we reward students for doing their very best.

Earning a black belt is the definitive symbol of achievement, and it is a symbol that even the youngest of our students comprehend. Even those who know nothing about martial arts understand that a black belt is earned through hard work, dedication and the ability to stand out from the crowd.

To achieve such rank, students show their endurance and spirit. We consider it part of our job to help cultivate this spirit in others, and know it is the spark that lights the fire within our students to achieve and excel.

We don't just say our students are among the best and brightest; we know it is true. They are the very symbols of determination and grit.

If you feel you or your child can benefit from learning, growing and becoming motivated to do the very best, I would encourage you to take the step and visit our school.

These few months have introduced you to the very best way you can make positive changes for yourself, your child and your family.

Self-discipline, self-confidence, and excellence are all within your reach. I hope you have come to realize the great power that is you – and your child.

It would be an honor to help you discover the potential and the ability within you.

This is my last newsletter so, if I don't hear from you, let me take this opportunity to wish you great success in life.