

Thesis for 7<sup>th</sup> Dan Grading. By Christine Young-Jasberg

## Teaching Taekwon-Do to Gen Z - Synopsis

In this thesis we will identify what motivates Gen Z students. How you as an instructor can keep a growth mindset and keep up with the times. And finally, a few things to avoid doing when instructing your classes.

## Teaching Taekwon-Do to Gen Z

It's year 2020. **Gen Z** is the newest **generation** to be named and were born between 1995 and 2015. They are currently between 5-25 **years** old. This age group accounts of 78.7%<sup>1</sup> of the current itkd NZ membership.

Each generation views the world differently from the generation before.

Most instructors will belong to a different generation than the students in their classes. Many will wish for the good old days when students didn't answer back, and they just did as they were told. The youth of today, we lament.

In this thesis I will share some insights from my observations from the past 13 years of teaching classes predominantly filled with Gen Z students.

It is no longer enough that you are the black belt and their instructor. They are not obedient just because of these. They need reasons why to do what you say. They may only do what you say if you motivate them in the right way that suits them.

Here are common attributes Gen Z gets airbrushed with:

- Sense of entitlement
- Want everything now
- Thinks everything should be easy to attain
- Less resilient compared to previous generations
- Gives up more easily than previous generations
- Always moving onto the next thing if things don't go their way

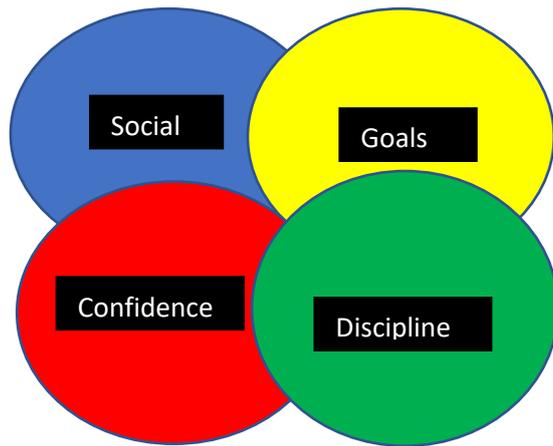
How do we get through to and retain Gen Z students in Taekwon-Do?

We need to give them what they seek. Does this mean we need to treat each student as unique and different from the next? Well good news. They maybe not be all that different. From my observations, in this thesis I suggest that we can classify what students seek into 4 motivators. I call these motivators the WHYS.

I have simplified the whys into 4 spheres: They are not mutually exclusive and may overlap but there will be a dominant reason.

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<sup>1</sup> Statistical data provided by Mr Neil Breen from the itkdNZ database as of 5 Dec 2019



These whys are characterised as follows:

**Social:** the socially motivated student is there to have fun, be with others. They want to belong to something. They identify with being part of the club and buy the club hoodies and wear the club logo proudly. They like the camaraderie of training with others.

**Goals:** the goal-oriented student is there to obtain grades, and ultimately their black belt. They like the recognition of rank. They are competitive and like to do competitions and win medals. They need new challenges and like to be given challenges. These students thrive on being in the spotlight.

**Confidence:** this is the student who genuinely wants to learn self-defence, they are here to do something for themselves, to help them get over their fears. Whether it be standing up to bullies at school, just standing up for themselves, having to perform in front of people or a genuine fear of violence. They often have low self-confidence in themselves, and whatever they do is not good enough. They prefer to be invisible in class, and hate being the centre of attention. They need lots of positive encouragement and positive feedback. Sometimes these students need to have challenges broken down in manageable parts, so they achieve goals in smaller steps. When helped to stay on the right path these students are very loyal.

**Discipline:** this group is dichotomous. On one level are the students brought to Taekwon-Do because mum or dad wants to learn some focus, self-control and increased attention spans. They are the ones seeking discipline. Given the right patience and care these students can and will develop the discipline that their parents hope for them. Having rules and boundaries in the TKD class is important and it is fine to enforce rules with this group of students.

On the flip side there are students who are here because of they like the stricter rules and discipline of a martial arts class. The lining up and bowing, routines and etiquette appeals to their sense of order and discipline. It is a welcome oasis from the chaotic free-style world that we now live in. Classrooms these days are open plan, with multiple teachers, and work pods instead of desks. Often students with OCD, ADHD, autism, respond well to the structure and orderly behaviour of a TKD Class.

On top of these whys the most important ingredient required to be successful in reaching Gen Z is that classes must be FUN.

We need to give Gen Z what they seek. And they need to have fun.

My thesis proposes four types of whys, and we need to modify our delivery for each of the groups. Of course, our class will contain all 4 types of students. So how do we give them what they need without giving them all private tuition?

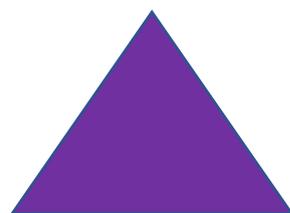
This is where we need to develop ourselves as instructors. First, we need to take a top down approach. What I mean by this is we need a student-centred outlook. How many of us still take a self-centred approach to instructing? We teach what we are comfortable delivering instead of what the student needs. Gen Z wants each class focused on their needs and to be about them. That's classic Gen Z. They want to feel you care about them as an individual. This also means that how our instructor taught us may not be well received anymore. E.g. being punished for being late, being growled at for talking or fidgeting. We need to enforce the etiquette and behaviour expectation in new ways that do not affront the individual.

Second, we need to have a growth mindset. We need to keep up with Gen Z. General Choi was immensely scientific in his approach to the techniques of TKD. He introduced sine wave at a time where traditional martial arts were advocating going direct from A to B in a straight line.

The study of sports science and the body of knowledge around physical human biomechanics has grown phenomenally during Gen Z's lifespan. As an instructor for Gen Z we need to be aware and have a working knowledge of the current thinking. Gen Z are being taught these at high school. A growth mindset means that we are developing ourselves and our knowledge. Are we keeping up? Do we engage in professional development for ourselves? Having a growth mindset means we are willing to receive new information and we are willing to change how we do things.

Finally, we need to explore our why? Our why should be summed up in our coaching philosophy. I have a pyramid philosophy as follows:

At the top is FUN



On the left base is SKILL

On the right base is DISCIPLINE

This is my personal vision for why I instruct Taekwon-Do. I want my students to have fun in my classes, but progress or grades is on a strict skills basis, so technical knowledge is important. I like to impart and impress upon them the need to have a high skill level. On the other base of my pyramid I want them to learn about discipline, whether it be self-

discipline or respectful-ness, or taking a disciplined approach, yet I rarely use growling to enforce the discipline I expect to see. It encompasses the Do part of Taekwon-Do.

Your personal why may be to help others grow. Or it could be to share your passion. This will be personal to you but think upon it and it should guide your unique style of instructing.

We do all this, but our good work can all be undone if we do not avoid doing what I call instructor traps.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Instructor traps to avoid.**

I have summarised key mistakes instructors make when delivering classes.

No. 1 Talking too much.

Instructors to Gen Z should stick to a maximum of 2 minutes talk time as a rule of thumb. This means after 2 mins of talking we need to get some physical exercise going, at least 10 minutes. After all they are here to learn Taekwon-Do not to listen to a sermon. There are some exceptions such as teaching the "Do" or some aspects of self-defence. Too much talking means not enough action. Not enough action means the students are not getting their dose of why.

No. 2 Not enough variety in your classes.

E.g. Giving the same lesson month after month. Have you been instructing for 10 years or have you been an instructor for 10 years? Too much of the same means boredom. Boredom means the students are not getting what they seek.

No. 3 Mismatched delivery with the Whys.

Take care not to use the wrong delivery method to suit the why of that student. E.g. A student who seeks confidence does not want to be put in the spot-light and asked to perform in front of classmates. A goal-oriented student does not like doing the same things all the time. Mismatched delivery means unpleasant experience. Unpleasant experience is the opposite of what students seek.

No. 4 Not enough energy / personality.

An instructor is a leader. The students take their lead from you. If you have low energy in class, then the students will have low energy. Low energy means a boring, limp class. A limp class means not enough endorphins released which means students don't get what they need.

In summary, understand the whys of the Gen Z student. Grow yourself and invest in your own knowledge. Keep a growth mindset. Finally avoid the instructor traps because that will undo all your good work.

There we have it. Teaching to Gen Z. *Christine Young-Jasberg December 2019.*