

“How does Taekwon-Do provide leadership qualities for youth? What do you do in your club specifically to develop leadership and what ideas do you have to further develop leadership in your club or the organisation?”

We know that training in any martial art brings many benefits.

You get a total body workout, increasing your stamina, muscle tone, flexibility, balance and strength. This will help with a healthy lifestyle and improve your cardiovascular (fitness) system, and of course weight loss.

Self-confidence and the ability to be more comfortable in general situations or more serious, possibly dangerous ones. Training (and the right attitude) will help focus your mind and discover along the way that we can accomplish anything.

Improved reflexes, focus, and stillness. As a martial artist, you will learn what it is to be still, challenged and focused.

The mind is another important aspect of training benefits. Ranging from better moods, less stress and frustration in general - but ultimately happy in life. Studies have proven endorphins released by physical activity remain in our body many hours after exercise.

Lastly (in this list) is the mortal values(the do) part of training. Through consistent practice, we become less impulsive, and aggressive. Patience, insight, calmness, a good attitude (frame of mind) are things that we strive to achieve.

We also know that people start training for many reasons. From doing something as a family or fitness, self-defence/protection, for social needs, and more. Leadership is likely the furthest thing from our minds. Especially “why” we start. I’d bet money on it that people just don’t start training in martial arts like Taekwon-Do to be a ‘leader’.

Most martial arts students, especially children/young adults don't think about leadership even years after they first started. Under most circumstances by helping their instructor(s) teach small groups of juniors in a larger class. Or is forced upon them by circumstances, for example, when their instructor hangs up their belt and retires. Till that time not realising that their training has built many characteristics that help you become the new mentor, instructor, leader.

What does **leadership** mean? It has many definitions: “Leadership” *noun* is defined as: “*the position or function of a leader, a person who guides or directs a group*” the “*ability to lead*” or to “*provide leading, guidance; direction*” and “*leaders of a group*”.

Focusing on leadership - ***How does Taekwon-Do provide leadership qualities for youth?***

The saying often goes that children are our future. That cannot be truer. The young people of today will someday be responsible for the well-being of the human race. These children wake up each day, go to school, learn new skills, and one day lead us into a bright new future.

Martial arts training can help and provide leadership qualities such as giving our students the power to educate and help others. When children join they learn many things, but after gaining more skills and higher proficiency, comes an ability to impart their knowledge gained to their fellow students. It's common for students to demonstrate skills and techniques they've already learned to help new or lower-ranked students. Or to teach a new routine to their peers, perhaps show how they get out of a situation in sparring or self-defence. The ability to teach others is a great leadership skill that can be applied throughout their lives.

One of the many great benefits of martial arts training is that children develop a solid sense of confidence within themselves. Martial arts and its techniques require a certain degree of patience and attention to detail. The many moves in various disciplines take years to master. However, once students have learnt the techniques, there is a sense of accomplishment. This sense of accomplishment empowers children with self-esteem and confidence which is necessary to become good leaders. When students are confident in themselves, they are better suited to help others by 'leading by example' or helping one another.

Social skills are also a great leadership quality. During training, students are required to interact with each other, in activities like sparring drills and pad work. During your martial arts training, you meet new friends and build strong lifelong relationships.

Perhaps the most important lesson martial arts teaches us is the value of perseverance and discipline. In life, things will not always go as we had planned. We will encounter trials and tribulations, difficult times that will require determination.

Martial arts training pushes our mind, body, and spirit. Forever learning about ourselves, and how we can push through anything we put our minds to. This is so important for us all. A great skill to be taught early in life. Do not give up! No one will follow a leader that just gives in.

Now while we talk about leadership and what training does to support this growth, we can and should support their training. I briefly spoke about demonstrating techniques to the class, which can be as simple as doing a flying sidekick with a pad. Your class can actively encourage students to take a small group of students, and teach them something new, like their next pattern. So the question:

What do you do in your club specifically to develop leadership?

For some background, our club Pil Sung with Master Gray Patterson, the club is broken down into two classes, a junior and adults class (12+). Our adult class is almost always taken by Mr Patterson, while he does get a few of the senior black belts (including myself) to teach at times. He likes to direct most of the learning himself. The junior class is run by Ms Suzanne Patterson, helped by Mr Hanna and others at times. So from a club perspective, I look at other clubs I've either been involved in or participated in over the years.

Examples of things that I feel help grow students are:

- Having social activities outside of the club. Game nights, BBQs, and general club social (non-dobok) gatherings. I've seen in the last 6 months running as a small club each Saturday; which is awesome!
- Having a good range of helpers/instructors. Ranging in rank and age. Where I've seen this work particularly well is when the instructors have a roster, where each instructor will teach a group of students, the same students for that cycle of a roster. Which is changed regularly between the assistant instructors. Having a known period of time (say 3 weeks) means that the instructor can plan what they are going to teach and how to teach their curriculum, but more importantly, seeing their students' growth and improvement. Teaching the 'teacher'. Giving them the skills to learn as they become more confident in what they do, and how they approach their class(es). Learning what 'not' to do is important in the learning process in becoming a better instructor, leader, and person.

"What do I do"? While I don't officially instruct at our club (Note: I do plan to open a club when my youngest daughter is older) I help when asked, I offer to help, Master Patterson doesn't ask many to help in his club (as such I feel it's a real honour to be asked).

So I support students to ask questions, make them think about why or how they do perform an activity (form, move, sequences). I focus on the big-ticket items - posture and movement, with the idea that while heights and correct technique are important. Knowing/feeling what a technique is, or how to move your body functionally is just as important. For me, having students have feelings, and ideas as to why we do something is more important than following a set of instructions to make 'shapes'.

I know I've learnt more about feeling the movement and understanding how my own body moves have helped my confidence and leadership skills. So I actively try to instil a good base for students to learn from. A skill base that is broadly applicable to any martial art, or sport (functional movement). So I've learnt over the years that a good understanding of base fundamentals provides me confidence, that allows me to show leadership while training. This of course leads into my personal and professional lives too.

Leadership is not something you are just given or should expect. When a student trains hard and receives their black belt, it shows dedication and a level of proficiency. Students and people will respect you and listen to what you have to teach. You walk the walk so to speak.

The 'Martial Way' is important (to me) - to be strong and be confident that we can handle/deal with whatever comes at us - this is done with physically hard training. Increasing their bodies ability to withstand everyday life - not just for fighting... stress at school or work and whatever life throws at you. So that is why I like to teach others, train hard, gain confidence, and in doing so become someone that contributes - passing on what you've learnt to the new generation of students.

I feel that I contribute to the Dojang by being a confident and positive student, willing to learn and try new things. Helping others, and being social to create a positive place. In the hopes that others will do the same. Not everyone can be a teacher. But everyone can help lead or be a leader in an aspect of our Taekwon-Do training. But everyone can contribute something to the club.

- ***and what ideas do you have to further develop leadership in your club or the organisation?"***

Our organisation is fantastic, we are a strong community, not too big to cause massive disruption and factions. Our standards are high and it shows, based on our many successful overseas world championships. We have a number of internally recognised people, including Master McPhail as part of the ITF technical committee, and others like Mr Mark Trotter and Mr Carl Van Roon both very successful in representing NZ internationally.

Our organisation has been built on great leadership. People that showed positivity, resourcefulness, a range of perspectives in the face of challenges. These positive attitudes are examples of what inspire others, creating stronger friendships, opportunities to create new relationships, that benefited our organization, making it what it is today. This is our success. How do we develop new leaders, to pass this great organisation on to?

We need to do more of what works. Build our relationships within our clubs, more importantly, build relationships between our clubs, and regions. During my research and reflection on 'leadership', I came across this [article](#) and the section "**Connection is Protection**" drew me in.

“In leadership literature, this kind of connection is called a high-quality connection. [Ross Professor Jane Dutton’s](#) work on the subject explains why I feel so alive and energized during and after Aikido practice. Her research outlines that high-quality connections increase engagement, vitality, and trust. These kinds of connections are equally important to the workplace and our personal lives. Engaging in a high-quality connection generates joy, creativity, and a greater aptitude to learn. Just as we use this type of connection in Aikido to peacefully resolve conflict and learn from our experiences with training partners, high-quality connections are used to foster more effective and motivated individuals, teams, and organizations.”

We want an organisation that is stronger and one that will continue long after we retire. If you take that last sentence (above). A strong ‘social’ connection in our organisation will help ‘foster’ a more effective team of tkd’ers.

I feel that having a stronger link to more students from other clubs, and ideally in other regions will help encourage ideas, teach more students these ‘leadership’ skills (and from a different perspective), and help build a sense of responsibility to our wider network. Helping where/ when needed, we; are more likely to put our hand up to contribute, solve issues, run, or organize an event(s).

Another good start is a plan for more camps and other non-sport focussed events. Having regular seminars to teach our students as one region would be a good way to ‘connect’. We already do instructor conferences, black belt events, and IICs. But we need more focus on building up our more junior belts so they establish relationships that will see them through many years to come.

But where to start. I think that we should reintroduce at least one or two regional gradings per year. Including a seminar (on the same day) to help create friendships and a sense of belonging to a bigger network. We could look at making the attendance of these go towards some formal requirement to grade? We have credit points for tournaments, perhaps we also include a requirement to attend formal non-tournament based training? Particular targetted at black belts so we can give back to the organisation.

This is something I’d like back, training as a bigger group of people, training with more black belts at events like this, helps me and other black belts. More importantly, the younger junior ranks get a lot out of training with us too. I know when I was younger I got so much out of training with ‘scary’ black belts! (Training in the ’80s was very different)

To conclude, people and community are the most important things. We all start our martial arts journey for different reasons. But what keeps us going is the connections and friendships we make along the way. A good network of people will help ensure we continue to help all of us to learn, and create new leaders.