

Why do you want to learn Martial Arts?

By Gary James

I had a phone call the other day and I thought it was quite interesting and decided it would be a good topic for an article.

I was busy doing some work that had a very short deadline when the phone rang.

“Hello”, I said.

“Hi, is this Gary?” a voice asks.

“Yeah, what can I do for you”, I replied.

“I am interested in doing some lessons; can you tell me how much it costs?”

This is generally the first thing most people want to know, almost like they are shopping around to see what the best deal is.

After I explained all this he said, “That sounds OK. When are classes and where are they?”

My next response is usually “did you get my details from my website?”

“Yeah”,

Now usually this is the time I think to myself, why I bother having a website with class information, days, times and location on every page of this site when just about every person who contacts me asks the same questions. I calm myself down and decide that maybe he wants to engage me in conversation about what it is we do.

I calmly ask him, “Are you interested in the Mount Colah, Berowra or Freshwater class as all the information is available on the website?”

His response, “do you have a class in Camden?” I hang up.

Sorry, that was another call. Getting back to the call I was talking about.

“I am interested in the Mount Colah class as I live nearby.” I said, “Great, do you know where the Community Centre is?” he said, “Yes”.

I think I am getting somewhere now, so I tell him classes are 7-8.30 on Monday nights.

I say, “Why do you want to learn Martial Arts?”

“I need to lose some weight and get fit” he says.

“Yeah, it is pretty good exercise and it will help improve your fitness, but why do you want to learn martial arts?”

“A mate told me I should have a go as he did some Karate when he was younger” he says.

“OK that’s great, but why do you want to learn Martial Arts?” I ask.

“I saw a Bruce Lee movie and I thought that would be pretty cool to do what he does”

“You do understand that was just acting and what we do does not look anything like what you will see in the movies, we teach Jeet Kune Do which is his martial art and not jumping around using guns and back flips. Again, why do YOU want to learn Martial Arts?” I ask.

“I guess it is because I want to learn to take care of myself and learn a bit of self defence” he sheepishly replied.

And that my friend is what it is all about.

What we do is teach fighting skills, martial arts are about learning to hurt people. I get so frustrated when people are not honest with themselves. If they want to make friends, get fit and exercise, then go to a gym, or play football, if you want to learn to fight then go to a martial arts school.

Why is it that people have difficulty in honestly expressing themselves? They want to learn to fight and they want someone to teach them, it is that simple.

If your car is not working you go to a mechanic and say “my car isn’t working I want you to fix it.” That is so easy. You go to a doctor when you are sick and say “you are a doctor fix me so I can get better.” So, why can’t you ring a martial artist and say “I don’t think I can defend myself if I should get into a fight and I want you to fix me so I can.” That’s not so hard.

Is this a throwback to more primitive times when the man was the defender of his cave, if he could fight he could keep it or is more to do with he thinks he is born with the ability to fight and he doesn’t have to do anything more than that, by asking someone to teach them is a sign that they are weak and incapable of defending their cave.

Try this as an experiment when you are in a social gathering and there are a lot of people you don’t know around you, tell people you are a martial artist and wait for their reactions and responses.

First thing that happens is they look you up and down and assess if they think they could kick your butt. Then you will get one of the following responses.

1. I have a mate who does Tae Kwon Do or Karate, his name is George do you know him? (yeah, I know everyone who is a student or instructor)
2. I did a little Karate when I was younger; I can break a board, can you? (no, but I can crack a smile at that one)
3. I guess I don’t want to meet you in a dark alley (what would I be doing in a dark alley?)
4. I need to see that guy over there, catch you later (discussion ended)
5. They change the topic to football, golf, soccer or something else that is more manly and acceptable (I need to see that guy over there, catch you later)
6. Dead silence

Once I had someone tell me that his mate was a black belt and he could beat me in a fight. This guy knew nothing about me, what I did, whether I could fight or not, how long I had been doing martial arts or anything but he knew his mate could do me. What did his mate have against me and why does he want to fight anyone else who does martial arts. I was confused and told him so.

So getting back to the phone call, the guy said, “I suppose I will drop in and have a look”, he still hasn’t turned up and I knew he wouldn’t.

This all comes back to motivation which is really what this article is all about.

A student starts training; he turns up night after night, gaining skill and developing knowledge and power. He was motivated to begin lessons, he is motivated to keep coming to lessons, he is improving and learning the basic skills in fighting; movement, speed, power, co-ordination and technique. He trains for a while and then he slowly starts to miss a few lessons and then a few more, his attendance becomes irregular and grades take longer to get. What has happened to the keen student who first walked in the door? Well, first thing is this is not the same student who started

lessons with you. This person is more confident, has different skills, can do things he couldn't do before.

So why has his progress slowed and his attendance become erratic? Usually it is the pressures on the person from outside the class, girlfriends, family and particularly friends because they don't understand what you are doing. It is also at this point that the student starts to believe; hey I think I can defend my cave so maybe I don't need any more lessons and if that is the reason then be honest with yourself and admit it.

It is always uncomfortable bumping into ex students in the street or at the shops, not for me because I am happy to say hi and how are you going. It is uncomfortable for them and they usually blather things like I have had an injury and I will be coming back soon, are classes still at the same place. As far as I am concerned if they aren't coming back I don't care, that's their decision and I never mention classes, I am just saying hello. Again be honest and true with yourself no justification is necessary or asked. If you see me around just say hello.

A lot of good students leave around this time, their needs have been met and they can go on with their lives, but the students who stay on have had their initial needs met and yet they still train and this is where it goes full circle. These students have integrated their training into their lives, it has become part of who they are and they want to get as much from it as they can. They don't make excuses for themselves. They have learnt the rudiments of self defence and want to now take it to a higher level, they also want to continue exercising, adding to their fitness and made friends who are different to their other friends, these are the ones they can talk martial arts with. Further down the track some of these students start to think about helping other students and becoming instructors themselves, maybe even think about having their own school later on. Why do some people learn and fade away and others stay on and progress and reach higher levels of ability. It comes back to motivation. The thing that motivated you to start is not the same as the thing that motivates you to stay.

You start because you want to learn to defend yourself (once you are being honest), then once you believe this goal has been met you either allow the outside to affect you or you change your goal and decide to see what else you can learn and see if the old guy out front has anything left to show you.

One thing I like to tell students is;

“I have taught you everything **you know**; but I haven't taught you everything **I know**.”