
So You Want to Quit Taekwon-Do.....

Why Should You Stay?

A

IV Dan Thesis

By

Daniel Kohler

May 1997



INTRODUCTION

It is said that Taekwon-Do is a life long pursuit, however, many many students begin the study of Taekwon-Do only to quit long before their lifetime is complete. Why?

There are probably as many factors why students consider quitting Taekwon-Do as there are students and reasons why they start. Some of these may sound familiar, or even be things that have crossed your own mind from time to time:

- My Job Schedule makes it difficult for me to train consistently.
- It's too hard for me to find time to work, go to school, and do Taekwon-Do.
- Taekwon-Do interferes with my other leisure activities.
- I need to spend more time with my family.
- My spouse doesn't participate in Taekwon-Do and doesn't understand why I spend so much time and money on a hobby which doesn't include them.
- Taekwon-Do costs too much for me to do all the things I'm expected to do, monthly dues, seminars, testings, tournaments, instructor courses, referee certifications, and out-of-town events.
- I'm getting too old to do Taekwon-Do.
- I've made my goal of becoming a Black Belt, so now I can quit.
- Other people are passing me up and the instructor won't let me test.
- No one appreciates all I do for Taekwon-Do.
- I'm just going to take a little while off, and then I'll get back into it.
- They're too strict.
- It's boring.
- It's too hard.
- It's always the same stuff.
- It's no fun any more.

Understanding why people stop training in Taekwon-Do is essential to giving them reasons why they should stay. Although we hear a lot of excuses, most of the real reasons why students leave can be placed into three main categories: 1) Personal Priorities, 2) Physical and Time Constraints, and 3) Personal Expectations.

Some reasons why students quit may not be so easily identified and may be a deeper problem than is readily apparent. However, the purpose of this thesis is to identify some of the common causes why students become dissatisfied with Taekwon-Do, and rather than quit, help them identify what benefits can be attained by staying with what they have started.

PERSONAL PRIORITIES

Each of us has a unique set of personal priorities. Our personal list of priorities is what motivates us to act on most things in our life. What makes them unique to each individual depends on our background, personal code of ethics, and our environment. Another factor that effects each individual's list of personal priorities is that they are constantly changing. If an individual is committed to attaining a specific goal or objective, they may have an easier time identifying their personal list of priorities which will help them attain this goal. When we have an objective in mind, there is less of a chance that we will change our priorities because they are goal oriented. If there is **not** a finite goal in mind, personal priorities, can become more flexible as long as they are consistent with the individual's overall objectives, and do not interfere with their overall moral code. We may or may not have firm goals established toward which we are constantly and cognitively working toward. When we are not committed to definite course of action and things get complicated in our lives, we tend to want to simplify and follow the path of least resistance. When this happens, a person will find that they are at odds with themselves and in conflict with their personal priorities. Conflicts with personal priorities can come from a desire to do other things in addition to Taekwon-Do, feeling the need to spend more time with family and friends, or be financial in nature.

Family, Friends, and Taekwon-Do

Family and friends can put tremendous pressure on the Taekwon-Do practitioner to quit. A spouse may feel neglected because they are not included in the what you are doing, or that you spend too much time with your TKD buddies, and no time with them. Your friends may also effect your schedule and want you to spend time in other activities which might conflict with your Taekwon-Do training schedule.

People in general like a variety of things. Sometimes it may just be you saying to yourself, "I'd like to be able to do something besides Taekwon-Do once in a while."

Maintaining the balance with family, friends, and other interests is different for each individual. As an instructor or a friend of another TKD stylist, you must be careful in the advice you give to some one struggling with this aspect, because you may unwittingly put additional pressure on them to take more time away from people they need to be with in order to preserve their personal relationships. When someone says that they need to spend more time with their family, keep in mind that you as an instructor also need to council your students on relationships outside of Taekwon-Do. "It is an instructor's responsibility to develop students outside as well as inside the do jang."¹ If you are understanding and patient, your students will want to continue.

¹ Taekwon-Do (The Korean Art of Self Defence), by General Choi Hong Hi, Published by the International Taekwon-Do Federation, 1991, p. 44.

Show Me The Money!

How many times have you heard, "Taekwon-Do costs too much, and I can't afford it anymore?" People usually find money for the things they really want to do. Taekwon-Do should be considered a leisure time activity, the same as tennis, skiing, or mountain biking. How much does it cost to ski ten or twelve times in a season, let alone ski clothing, transportation, and equipment? What about becoming a certified scuba diver, and taking a dive trip once a year? How much do season tickets to your local professional basketball, football, baseball, or hockey team cost?

In comparison with other leisure activities, Taekwon-Do is not that expensive, especially for colored belt students. Sometimes we feel as upper ranked Black Belts that the things we are asked to participate in are way too expensive. However, as a student first and foremost, we must consider the benefits attained by each event or function we attend and the knowledge we can bring back to our own students. "In order to be a good instructor, you must first be eager to learn."²

The balance between cost and benefit can be a double edged sword and must be handled with respect. As instructors, we need to be especially careful not to expect our students and associates to work endlessly for us on the premise that it's expected to make the organization work. We should not make unreasonable demands that we be entertained at some one else's expense, or give the appearance that we are taking advantage of our rank for personal benefit. We can very easily give others in Taekwon-Do the wrong impression if we are too eager to take all the credit, receive all the money, or appear on the upper end of the ranks to be living in the lap of luxury while our students are struggling to make ends meet and pay for all that's expected that they do in the study of Taekwon-Do.

"Unfortunately man often relies too much on worldly position which is transient at best, for what man gives can also be taken away. On the other hand, what heaven endow us with is eternal. This is not to say that we reject all worldly things but rather that we keep both positions in proper balance so that the virtues of the former position provides guidance for the proper use of the latter."³

After all, for most people, Taekwon-Do is a leisure time activity. It's supposed to be fun! If you're in it to make a living, remember who pays the bills and make sure they appreciate all you do in exchange for the money.

² General Choi Hong Hi, "International Instructor's Course", Santa Barbara, California, February 1995.

³ Taekwon-Do by General Choi Hong Hi, 1991, p. 29.

Break Time

"I just need some time away from Taekwon-Do to get my head on straight and take care of some other things which have been neglected too long." When someone truly does have financial, family, or time problems it is a matter of personal priorities. Each individual must set their own priorities, and sometimes other things in their life will take precedence over Taekwon-Do, even for the most dedicated practitioner.

Taking some time off is not always bad. Sometimes a break can do wonders for your mental and physical well being. That's why we go on vacation from work, or leave from the military, or go on spring break from school. We can come back with renewed vigor and intensity.

Too long of a break, however, can far too often result in apathy and then a permanent "vacation" from Taekwon-Do. Don't let yourself be fooled into dropping out by thinking it's just a little break. Take some time off when you need to, but then force yourself to come back, give it another try, and persevere. Always remember, no matter how long you've been away you can always get started again. It may take a while, but you can regain your former confidence and attain new heights.

PHYSICAL AND TIME CONSTRAINTS

Each of us has from time to time had a physical reason why they have not been able to train for a specific time. This may have been because of an injury, illness, or legitimately not having enough time to physically do all that was needed.

Understanding physical and time constraints placed on our students can help us counsel them so that temporary conflicts with continued training will not be perceived as a reason for them to permanently leave Taekwon-Do.

Aches and Pains on the Long Haul

Have you heard someone say, "I'm not as young as I used to be and this is just too much for these old bones to handle." The older we get the harder it is for us to be motivated to physical activity on a regular basis. The aches and pains of physical training become harder for us to ignore with longevity in Taekwon-Do and with the effect of the passing years on our bodies. This can be a legitimate concern for a practitioner to exercise some personal restraint during training, but it can also become a rationalization for them to fall away from their training regimen.

General Choi states, "A 60 year old, 85 pound, one armed woman can derive as much personal satisfaction, along with marked improvement in her mental and physical state of

health, as an 18 year old Olympic decathlon champion."⁴ While an individual who is over sixty may not train with the same vigor that an eighteen year old student will, it should be noted that each individual can push themselves to achieve good physical conditioning for their age.

"I've never met anyone that's truly too old to practice Taekwon-Do, I'm getting too old is not an issue of personal priority it is an excuse, and may have an underlying reason behind it."⁵ Each of us needs to, as General Choi says, "Be willing to go where the going may be tough and do the things that are worth doing even though they are difficult."⁶

As instructors, we should make it our responsibility to understand our students, and when we hear one of them saying they are too old to continue training, take steps to make sure we are not ignoring a much larger problem. We need to be considerate of our older students and insure that they are not expected to do more than they are truly physically able. However, we owe it to all of our students to challenge them to do their personal best to better themselves physically and mentally, and constantly improve their personal Taekwon-Do technique.

Taekwon-Do, Work, and School

You've probably heard someone say, "I'm too busy at the office to work out as much as I should, or, I don't have enough time for work, school, and Taekwon-Do too." This can be a genuine problem. A person may really not be physically able to meet their commitments at work, or school, and still have the physical time to come to Taekwon-Do class.

While conflicts between leisure, career, and academic activities could almost be categorized as a "personal priority" issue, a conflict with time seems to stem from an over-commitment to one's goals and objectives. "Money and especially time are generally not the real reasons why someone quits, because if it is something you truly want to do, you will find the time and the resources to do it. Most always, time is not a valid reason why you don't do something, it's just an excuse. There is usually another reason."⁷ People don't always give the real reason why they act or fail to act. It is up to the instructor to determine the real reason, and to devise an approach to help their students consistently attain their goals.

⁴ Taekwon-Do by General Choi Hong Hi, 1991, p. 40.

⁵ Personal Interview with Mr. Doug Arnold, V Dan, April 21, 1997.

⁶ Taekwon-Do by General Choi Hong Hi, 1991 p. 47.

⁷ Personal Interview with Mr. Doug Arnold, V Dan, April 21, 1997.

PERSONAL EXPECTATIONS

Each of us develops our own set of expectations for each set of circumstances we encounter. Sometimes our expectations are low, sometimes very high, and sometimes we postpone our evaluation to give the benefit of the doubt to a specific situation. Our personal expectations play a major role in our satisfaction with each personal relationship and situation we encounter. We constantly evaluate the attainment of our goals and objectives in relationship to our personal expectations. When our personal expectations are met we are happy, and when they are not we are dissatisfied with the outcome. As a student, we need to try to make sure we do not have false expectations, and as an instructor, we need to challenge our students with attainable goals, so that their expectations can be reached.

Been There, Done That, Got a T-Shirt

"I've been a Black Belt for years, I've been an international competitor, and I've ... been there ... and I've done that ... and etc., etc. ... so what's the point anymore?" Have you heard this or something similar? Goals are what keep us all going ... when we have reached our goals what do we have left to challenge and interest us? Reevaluating our goals, and reestablishing them is an ongoing process if we wish to continue to progress. Short sightedness can be devastating in the business world. It can also be devastating in our personal lives if we forget to reassess our goals for personal development. Taekwon-Do is no different.

When we start out in Taekwon-Do each one of us starts with different goals. We might start out with the goal of becoming a Blue Belt. As that goal comes within sight, we then need to set a new target, Black Belt, then 4th Dan, then Master Instructor. If we don't continue to expand our self expectations, we will stagnate and stop learning or pursuing that direction.

Many times it is not that we don't have goals, but that we have for one reason or another lost sight of our objectives. Sometimes little things or things of small consequence will cloud our view. Also, poor communication can often cause us to be distracted from our goals. Each of us needs to take personal responsibility to challenge ourselves to achieve new heights. As an instructor, we need to communicate clearly with our students and help them to not lose sight of their objectives. "To achieve something, whether it is a higher degree or the perfection of a technique, one must see his goal, then constantly preserve it. ... One of the most important secrets in becoming a leader in Taekwon-Do is to overcome every difficulty by perseverance."^{*}

^{*} Taekwon-Do, by General Choi Hong Hi, 1991, p. 13.

Are We Havin' Any Fun Yet?

People who complain that, "It's always the same, it's boring, or it's not fun anymore," are usually under challenged. When this encountered from a junior, the instructor should challenge them with a new goal, either in technique, or in personal achievement.⁹ This generally does not always need to be a major task or a long term goal. Long term goals are necessary for people to maintain consistent achievement, but they need to be broken down into attainable short term goals. To challenge a student with a short term goal can yield immediate results and still have long term residual benefits.

"There is a common tendency among beginners to tire of repeating the same techniques over and over. Boredom will usually set in ... when a student is building his Taekwon-Do foundation by learning fundamental technique and building power."¹⁰ The instructor needs to constantly find new ways of teaching the same things and stressing the same goals, so that the student will be challenged in new ways to meet those goals.

If things are too easy, people become complacent, don't try as hard as they can, and become bored. When they are challenged both mentally and physically, have an attainable goal, and are making recognizable progress toward their goals they are motivated, and are generally enjoying what they are doing.

The instructor needs to consistently challenge the student in a way that the challenge can be met. The student needs to recognize and accept the instructor's challenge and continue to achieve new personal heights.

The Instructor - Student Relationship

Although they may not have been specifically listed above, many of the more complex reasons why students leave Taekwon-Do can be attributed to a major breach in the "Instructor - Student" relationship. This too is a failure in communications and personal expectations, and needs special attention. The main problem areas stemming from a breach in this relationship generally involves one of the following points as listed in General Choi's *Encyclopedia of Taekwon-Do*.¹¹

- Always be honest with the students, and never break a trust.
- An instructor should not exploit his students.
- All students should be treated equally.
- Once an instructor becomes concerned with materialism, he will lose the respect of his students.

⁹ Personal Interview with Mr. Doug Arnold, V Dan, April 21, 1997.

¹⁰ *Taekwon-Do* by General Choi Hong Hi, 1991, p. 40.

¹¹ *Taekwon-Do* by General Choi Hong Hi, 1991, pp. 43-45.

Honesty is the best policy. When an instructor is not honest with his students and other Taekwon-Do associates that person will undoubtedly lose the others trust. When we do not trust someone or feel we are being exploited by them, we do not want to be around that individual. When this is the case, the person feeling disadvantaged will subsequently either leave association with the offenders or leave Taekwon-Do all together.

In addition to the selected points above, always remember to be fair and consistent with your students, be appreciative, and give credit where credit is due. This may sound idealistic, but when this doesn't happen, personal expectations are generally not met. Everyone from Instructor to Student gets the PPM's (Poor Pitiful Me) from time to time and needs positive reinforcement. Don't expect your students and associates to work tirelessly for you without acknowledgement. A little positive reinforcement can go long way.

As an instructor, you are entitled to fair compensation for your services. This compensation may or may not be monetary, however, a heavy emphasis needs to be placed on "fair" compensation. Should you become more interested in making money than developing your students, you will compromise your objectivity as an instructor. Your students will readily ascertain this, and you may be inviting problems between you and your students which cannot be rectified.

Instructors should always strive to be "fair" to their students, and treat each one with respect and equity. Unreasonable expectations should not be placed on any student. This puts a lot of responsibility on the instructor, but it is a awesome responsibility to be an instructor. We should all take the "Instructor - Student" responsibility seriously. It is important that both the instructor and the student strive to keep the "Student - Instructor" relationship a sound one.

Additional information on the "Student - Instructor and Instructor - Student" relationships can be found and studied in detail in the Encyclopedia of Taekwon-Do by General Choi Hong Hi.

Instructor, Mentor, and Confidant

Personal expectations can be unreasonable, and we can expect too much of those around us. When this happens we are destined for failure, because no matter what happens we will not be satisfied with the results of our endeavors.

To keep your sanity in Taekwon-Do each student needs someone to play three major roles in their Taekwon-Do life. An instructor, a mentor (or senior advisor), and a confidant.

The role of the student's instructor is to teach them both the spirit and the technique of Taekwon-Do. An good instructor will challenge his students to excel by setting goals and placing expectations on the student. If the student does not accept or meet these challenges it may be the student's fault, or it may be the instructor's fault for placing unreasonable expectations on the student. "Soldiers are as strong as the general who leads them, and, in like manner, students can only excel under an excellent instructor. We cannot expect a bamboo to grow in field of reeds, nor can we expect to find an outstanding pupil under an unqualified teacher."¹²

Having a mentor or a senior advisor can help the student understand their instructor's expectations, and not succumb to the notion that the goals that have been set are unobtainable. This mentor can also provide a perspective, from a senior who has been through similar experiences, to a junior who has limited vision. This perspective can be invaluable at times when the student may be overwhelmed or unsure of a personal direction. Having a mentor does not replace the need for an instructor, but rather compliments the instructor and the learning process.

Each one of us needs a confidant, someone who will listen to us when we are down, and who will inspire us to do our very best when we are up. It should be kept in mind that a confidant should not be a vehicle to criticize or be disrespectful to your instructor. The student should always be loyal to their instructor and never betray their trust. The purpose for having a confidant should be to reassure ourselves that we are not alone, that we are not the only ones who have problems from time to time, and that we can achieve our personal goals if we will only work hard at it.

CONCLUSIONS

People use a lot of excuses for what they do. Not all of them are related to the actual reasons why they do what they do. Sometimes the reasons we give for our actions are merely our own rationalizations. It is often hard for an instructor to understand why a beloved student has quit or why a student's instructor has decided to quit teaching, even though it has been explained why to them. People will quit from time to time no matter what anyone says or does, and they may not have any reason at all other than it's time for them to quit. As Taekwon-Do practitioners we need to be able to accept this when it does happen and not dwell on the why of it all to the point we begin to doubt ourselves and why we are in the art. "Life's problems are different for each of us and each of us needs a different way of solving them. Therefore, each of us has to create his own method. If you imitate, you'll be wrong. You have to create [a way] for yourself."¹³ Be honest with yourself about your reasons, should you consider quitting Taekwon-Do.

¹² Taekwon-Do, by General Choi Hong Hi, 1991, p. 46.

¹³ The Zen Way to the Martial Arts by Taisen Deshimaru, Published by The Penguin Group, 1982, p.20.

"Being able to determine the real reason behind inaction is a real gift, but it is the only way we can truly motivate someone to another course of action. Determining the real reason is a difficult task, it could be the student's fault, or the instructor's fault. It could be that the instructor is not challenging the student, or it could be that the student is backing down from the challenge, and is not rising to the occasion."¹⁴ If you consider the real reasons why you want to quit, and still want to continue, you will find a way to overcome your feelings and get back to what brought you to Taekwon-Do in the beginning.

Students should challenge themselves to be responsible for their own enjoyment, and meet the challenges given them. "Determination and Faith can overcome any obstacle."¹⁵

Conversely, instructors should make it their goal to challenge their students to achieve goals which they may not have set for themselves and to take responsibility not only for their students' progression but for their long term involvement in the art of Taekwon-Do.

"Hours spent training will not be wasted; for surely you will reap the reward in the form of speedy reactions and deadly blows to rain down upon your enemy or in any case to save life if and when the need arises. Even if Taekwon-Do is practiced for the sake of exercise alone, the enjoyment derived will justify the time invested and spent. As an exercise, it is equally suitable for the old and young, male and female."¹⁶

If people feel they are getting value and benefit for their money, they will keep coming back. If you make it fun and challenging, people will want to do it and will keep coming back. In general, if people are happy, challenged, and feel rewarded with what they are doing in the art of Taekwon-Do, they will make Taekwon-Do a "lifetime" activity.

¹⁴ Personal Interview with Mr. Doug Arnold, V Dan, April 21, 1997.

¹⁵ Taekwon-Do by General Choi Hong Hi, 1991, p. 7.

¹⁶ Taekwon-Do, by General Choi Hong Hi, 1991, p. 16.