

BLACK BELT **LEADERSHIP**

GUIDANCE ON LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Retention Begins When You Teach Your Students More Skills for the Big, Wide World, Instead of the Small Ring



By Tom Callos

Martial arts teachers, assistants and G.O.L.D. Leadership Team members: Forget your karate, your taekwondo, your aikido, and your kung fu, mixed martial arts (MMA) is the ultimate art. Why not use exactly what works when it is needed—without consideration of country of origin or history or philosophy? In a fight, who the heck cares from what art a technique came? If a kick kicks, if a choke chokes, if a punch lands, then who could ask for more?

I love MMA for its efficiency, no-nonsense approach, adaptability and lack of baggage. It is the ultimate art for the 625-square foot octagon, that 25' x 25' ring, where what works, works, and what doesn't results in a beating you won't soon forget.

The only thing about the fight game and everything related to the UFC and the phenomenon of cage-style fighting is that, well...it's made for the ring. If you take it from the ring and put it into a street-fight scenario, then the ideas certainly apply, but we're still talking about an activity that takes place in a relatively small amount of space (and infrequently too!).



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Why is this important to a discussion about the merits and value of MMA and teaching? The ring is small—and life, my friends, is very, very big. Life is the newborn baby, the smile on the face of your parents when you're seated around a meal; it's the way your heart feels when you are in love. Life is commerce; it's the flow of the river, the glint of morning sun on your daughter's face and the taste of an orange when it first hits your tongue. Yes, life is many things—and the point is that very few of them take place in the octagon.

The rules that work so well in the ring just don't apply to the big, old world. To live in the world in peace, to let our children grow to love, to live, to reach, to enjoy and to prosper, there are many other things they must know.

This, then, is for all teachers of karate (replace "karate" with your style, system, method, etc.). It's the proverbial wake-up call. If you define whatever you practice and teach as "fighting art", then you have hemmed in your thinking to approximately 625 square feet, in a world that is, obviously, significantly larger, richer and more complex than "the ring."

If you stop thinking small and realize our "ring", our playing field, is so BIG—and teach accordingly—then history, lineage, founders and philosophy take on a kind of importance that doesn't fit in a cage. If you teach with the world in mind, then your style can come alive, prosper, increase in value and make a difference (in a much larger and, dare I say, more relevant way).

If, as a teacher, your primary focus is on punching, kicking and grappling, then that's your choice. It doesn't make you bad or weak or anything, really—except less valuable to the world. My point, of course, is to encourage you to teach with a sense of mission, with intent, beyond winning fights. It is to convince you to think about the role that all art and movement and the classroom plays in teaching and life. With point made, I offer you a first step in how to play MMA on a scale that transcends the octagon.

Where the Fight is Today—and How to Do Something About IT

I taught UFC fighter BJ Penn his first year of lessons in fighting and Brazilian jiu-jitsu. Approximately six months

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into our training, I was fighting for my life against the kid (he was 17, I was 37), as he was so fast, so flexible and so smart on the mat that it was all I could do hold my own (I had 26 years of training under my belt at the time). When you face BJ Penn in the ring, you can expect to be hit and choked—thoroughly and quickly. Fortunately, you will most likely never have to see that “look” in BJ’s eyes when he’s decided it’s time for you to take a nap.

Unfortunately, in the game of life, it’s never a BJ Penn that knocks you off your feet. It’s your diet, your attitude, anger; it’s relationship issues, financial issues, your health; it’s everything that has nothing to do with kicks and punches. To be a master teacher and to make your art relevant to self-defense in the real world, you must transcend the subject matter. All of the great teachers transcend their subjects. The courses may have been architecture, art, science or math, but the greatest teachers teach about life.

At my martial arts association’s Web site (www.theonehundred.org), under the heading of “Resources,” you will find two free downloadable sets of flashcards (did I mention they’re free?) that spell out the top ten killers of adult males and females in the western world. This is a good place to start teaching beyond the ring. When you start teaching about defense from the point-of-view of the maladies that really kill people today (and note, death by punch or kick didn’t make the top ten list), then you begin teaching a kind of self-defense that is, well, TODAY and important.

MMA for the world—that’s what we’re moving towards; a transcending of anything that limits us from arming people with self-defense for the real world, for the world outside the ring. Ring arts and street self-defense will always be a part of the martial arts, like clothing and transportation will always be a part of life; but they are not life itself. MMA for the world doesn’t require us to forget things, on the contrary, it demands that we remember more, teach more, and expand our thinking and aim higher.



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