

HOW TO BUILD YOUR CLUB

Ronald Allan Charles

Want to double your club size overnight? Who doesn't? It's easy, theoretically. Simply tell each student to bring a friend to the next class. Or triple your membership by having each collar two friends!

Recruiting and retaining members is crucial to every club's survival. Repeatedly ask students to bring their eligible friends. It's in everyone's interest when a club can match up students by skills, size, age, or gender. If your club is for juniors, have them recruit kids. My club on the Joint Base Charleston, SC, Naval Weapons Station welcomes only military and Department of Defense. I refer civilians and youngsters to other clubs.

Some clubs offer discounts to those bringing in new students. One in my area awards cash to students who attract others.

When a person values something, whether it's a new computer game, barbecue restaurant, or religion, there's a desire to share that with friends. I tell students, "If you like what you're doing here, tell your friends. If you don't like what you're doing here, tell people whom you dislike. We'll treat them differently." I'm jesting, of course, but repeatedly I ask students, individually and collectively, to bring bodies to the mat.

We display page-sized colorful posters wherever we can. Each person who enters our dojo -- whether regular or the simply curious -- becomes an ambassador for our club, because we ask him to post two of the flyers in two places where he hasn't seen one.

When we are setting up mats, I raise the blinds so passersby can see what we are doing. Exposure helps. Sometimes, weather and daylight permitting, we warm up or do uchi-komi on the grass. Passersby may wonder what people wearing blue or white pajamas are up to. If they come within grabbing range, we nag, snag, and bag them.

I assign someone to cover the door to inform visitors about our activities. We twist arms to get them to join up right away. If they scurry, they can get their uniform and USJA membership, receive our safety briefing, learn the relationship between judo and jujitsu, see demonstrations of how judo works (especially the principle of giving way), learn to fall, and learn to throw someone, in the first class.

We accomplish all this in our ninety-minute intensive and productive class. My assistants and I work frantically to achieve these goals.

If a first-timer brings a procrastinating friend or someone without money, that person receives the safety briefing and observes his or her friend's initial class. If the procrastinator returns, he or she is ahead of the game. We can begin teaching falls and a throw, allowing more time for practice. If the person has money sufficient for either membership or judogi, I collect for membership. That protects us all.

I tell folks that if I can touch them, I can keep them. It's all about active recruitment. In my case, because of high turnover with military students, I have to recruit like crazy. My high energy level and enthusiasm are contagious.

Some of my assistants arrange demonstrations for their units, churches, or social groups, thereby exposing others to our judo and jujitsu program. This doesn't draw many into our revolving-door dojo, but we consider this a public service opportunity to educate and show off, plus earn promotion points and sometimes even a free feed!

We maintain a high profile by wearing judo T-shirts to class or sometimes judogi from parking lot to dojo. We send articles to local media whenever someone earns a promotion or recognition through certifications or tournament wins. Our club Propaganda Minister coordinates publicity.

Using these ideas, I have over time managed to bring my Samurai Judo Association club to the top of the Fifty Largest Clubs list with well over 500 members, about half of whom are active. The rest are retired Life Members.

Follow my suggestions to build your club. Let NOTHING slow your drive to bring feet to your tatami. There's no reason why EVERY club can't be the biggest club in the USJA.



Ronald Allan Charles holds is an 8th degree in judo and a 6th degree rank in jujitsu. He has taught martial arts for over 50 years and instructs the largest jujitsu and judo club in the USJA. His club, the Samurai Judo Association, is the largest in the USJA with over 250 active members. It's located at the Naval Weapons Station in Goose Creek, SC.

Website: www.judostamps.org/samurajudoassociation.

Video: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kbvs37lv0hQ>.