

Plan for Success

Plan your dive and dive you plan! That's a popular mantra in the world of scuba diving. Basically it means that before you enter the water you should have taken the time to plan things out in order to have a safe and enjoyable experience. In this first article in my role as Chairman of the Professional Judo Committee that is going to be my advice to you if you are considering becoming a full-time/professional Judo instructor: If you want your school to be successful you must PLAN properly.

I talk to a lot of people who ask a lot of questions about my school. Usually they've seen pictures on Facebook or heard from someone they know that I am having good success at building a large, profitable martial arts school with a strong Judo program. In most cases people want to know how I did it. "What's your secret?" they'll ask. I wish that there was one single, magical tip or trick that I could share with them and with you that would help everyone to grow their school but unfortunately there just isn't. The truth is that it takes a lot of hard work, planning, discipline, and determination. But all the hard work in the world won't amount to much if you don't have a plan, and the first place to start making your plan is by sitting down and spending some time deciding just exactly **what type of school you want to run.**

On the surface this seems like an easy question, right? Your answer might be "I want to run a Judo school!" but I'm afraid that's just not a good enough answer. You need to ask yourself some difficult questions. Questions like:

What will the main focus of my school be?

What goals, both short and long-term, do I hope to accomplish?

How much money does my school need to make in order for me to reach my financial goals?

How much will I charge for classes?

What classes will I offer? Will it just be Judo or will I offer other arts?

What ages will I accept?

Will I utilize contracts?

Will I utilize EFT's?

It's crucially important that you are 100% honest with yourself when considering the answers to these questions. You have to begin to establish an outline or vision for what you want your school to be like. This doesn't mean that you can't make changes along the way, but you do need a solid plan of attack before you get started so that you can put the right systems and resources in place. Moving forward in any other way would be like jumping off of a dive boat into deep water without the correct equipment. It's just not a good idea.

The first question that I listed above is perhaps one of the most important. "What will the main focus of my school be?" Again, it's not enough to just say that you want to teach Judo. You need to understand your potential customer base. What are THEY looking for? What drives THEM to call, email, or walk into your school? In Sales this is referred to as "Qualifying the Customer" and it is a crucial part of the sales process.

Many years ago we began using a multi-page, detailed health questionnaire for all new students. This questionnaire includes a 3 question survey on the very last page. The survey asks, among other things, "**What is your reason for looking into martial arts training?**" My wife and I always look at the answer to this question because this is very valuable information. It's important to know what it is that has motivated this person to look into training for themselves or for their child. After almost a decade of using this questionnaire I can tell you that **NOT ONE SINGLE TIME** has an adult student or a parent of a child student ever said anything about winning medals, becoming a national champion, or becoming an Olympian. So what kinds of answers do we get? I'll elaborate:

More often than not we get answers like these:

I want to get in shape/lose weight.

I want to learn to defend myself.

I want my son/daughter to learn to defend themselves.

My son/daughter is being picked on/bullied at school.

I want my son/daughter to learn discipline/confidence/self-control.

My son/daughter needs to do more physical activity/they spend too much time watching TV/playing video games.

These are the answers we get. These are the things that people are looking for when they come into our schools. If you want to be successful as a professional martial arts instructor you need to identify your customer base and what they want. If you aren't offering a product that satisfies their needs then they will almost certainly look elsewhere to find it. Many Judo instructors that I meet and talk to SAY that they know this. They SAY that they are offering the answers to these needs yet they still don't have more than a handful of students. Quite simply if that's the case then there is something wrong with the product that you are offering OR more than likely with the WAY that you are offering it.

Most Judo schools that I visit have a very tournament oriented way of teaching. Everything about the classes is built around Judo competition. The warmups are ran like everyone on the mat wants to be an elite competitor. The techniques are almost always taught in a competition oriented manner. The randori is almost always long and hard and done at a high intensity. Is this approach working for American Judo? Our abysmal number of active Judoka in this country say that it is not. Some people will read this article and their answer will be to say "Americans today are just too lazy and too weak to handle Judo training" There may be some very small amount of truth to that but in general I disagree. I say that Judo instructors have generally not done a good enough job of evolving to meet the needs of the current population of potential students.

I am most definitely NOT anti-competition. I have competed at every rank along the way in my Judo career and continue to compete even now. My adult students attend between 3 and 6 tournaments per year. My kids compete 2-3 times per year. The big difference is that my programs are not built solely on Judo competition. When used correctly competition can be a powerful tool to help some people gain strength and confidence. However, when used incorrectly competition can cost you a LOT of students. Again, you need to ask yourself what

are your goals? What is your main focus? In my opinion if you are still very much interested in becoming an elite level competitor or in producing other elite level competitors then you should probably not pursue Judo as your income generating occupation. I'm not saying that it's impossible to focus on both things, but I am saying that it will be VERY difficult. In my experience the vast majority of people who are looking for martial arts training are not looking into it for competition purposes. They are looking for self-defense, physical fitness, confidence, and fun. Assuming that everyone who walks through your doors has the desire to be a hard-core competitor is a big mistake and will lead to low sign-ups and low retention. Take the time to qualify your potential customers either on the phone if they call you or in person when they come to visit your school for the first time.

Sit down, do some thinking. Some soul searching. Really think about what you want to accomplish as a school owner. In the coming months I and the other members of the Professional Judo Committee will be contributing articles like this one to Growing Judo. We will also be uploading content to the USJA website and hopefully video content to a YouTube channel for USJA members to access. It is our hope that we will be able to help those of you who aspire to being successful, professional instructors achieve that goal.

The multi-page release form with survey that I mentioned in this article will be made available on the USJA website ASAP. Please feel free to take it, modify it, and put it to good use if you don't already have one that you are happy with.

Until next time!

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