

December 2017 Newsletter
Goju-Ryu Karate-Do Kyokai

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The Best For Last

By Bill Handren

I have held on to several Newsletter submissions by Mr. Stamper. What better time to print them all than the last issue of 2017. I thank Mr. Stamper for his patience, efforts and friendship.

Enjoy.....

First Grade

By Rich Stamper

Remember the story about the country boy who had twelve years of schooling? He did first grade twelve times.

So what? Well, that is sort of like a lot of karate practitioners (not us of course) who just keep doing what they learned to get to sho-dan over and over and over. Sure, they get better at what they do – just as the country boy most likely did.

By the end of first grade we had learned the alphabet, letter sounds, single digit addition, and could read simple sentences among other things. We didn't relearn those things in the third grade – they weren't taught every class - we moved on to new stuff.

By the end of the third grade we knew the multiplication tables, we dealt with two-digit numbers, had a grasp of sentence structure, and other things. We didn't relearn those things in the sixth grade – they weren't taught every class – we moved on to new stuff.

By the end of the sixth grade, we could multiply and divide fractions, understood absolute values and factorization, had a grasp of the scientific process, studied state history, and similar things. We didn't relearn those things in the ninth grade, they weren't taught every class – we moved on to new stuff.

And so on through our years of education. We didn't do letter sounds every class forever, we didn't do single digit addition every class forever, we didn't read four-word sentences exclusively forever - even though those things were the 'basics' everything else built on. Well, except for the aforementioned country boy, perhaps he did.

There is a certain comfort some people (not us of course) get from repetition of established skills. It is a familiar area, doesn't require the effort needed to develop a new skill, and is a validation of sorts. I heard there are seminars where little, if any, new material was presented and the participants were delighted. They really just wanted validation, not the challenge of learning new skills. Interesting to consider.

I suspect that some people (not us of course) never consider the possibility of filling their class time with new material every session and not spending valuable time on firmly established skills. Seems like students would want that. If that could possibly be the case - not even considering such a thing – the question might be why. Why would one repeat the well established, well developed, accomplished skills every class? Didn't do that in grade school did they? Oh....the country boy. Possible I guess.

It could be argued that it takes a lifetime to execute a good rising block. Really? My experience is that after ten years (or less) of practice there is no more improvement, and after fifty years it tends to degrade. So that proposition fails observed reality. Still, there will be argument from some.

Perhaps it's because that's the way it's always been done. Repeat the letter sounds every class kind of thing. There is a heritage of doing it that way. Or maybe the instructor doesn't know enough to fill the class time with new material instead of repeating the well-known over and over. Nah, that can't be it. Must be traditional.

Oh, well. Just musing – something to consider.

Did You Know?

By Rich Stamper

Did you know that drivers running on less than five hours of sleep are just as dangerous as drunk drivers statistically? Driving when you've missed only an hour or two of sleep the night before nearly doubles your crash risk. This is according to a study by the American Automobile Association. Brought to you in the public interest by our sponsors.

The Gift

By Rich Stamper

I had the good fortune of meeting one of our very long time GKK members for lunch a few days ago as he was passing through the Toledo area. We ate and talked about a variety of things and he presented me with a donation for the GKK.

When asked why he was donating he responded it was just because he wanted to.

So, okay, we all donate to organizations we believe have merit. His donation was two thousand dollars. In my opinion that is a very significant amount. And the significance of the reason for the gift is profound - he wanted to. Consider that for a minute and a half.

Almost every karate student I have spoken to that studied for a while and then left the training has told me that karate changed their lives. That they carried the many attributes of the training with them had provided the strength needed in tough times and helped them to be better people overall. Not one mentioned self-defense. I suspect that all of you who teach have experienced similar stories from your former students. Karate changes lives for the better and that is recognized by those who have been away from the training and yet experience the residual positive effects. I should note that this gentleman still practices on occasion. It's in our blood.

I sometimes wonder if those who are active practitioners appreciate all that karate has done for them. I do know that several of our members have provided first-hand accounts in our great Newsletter, so clearly there are those who do. And this gentleman I met with a few days ago understands that too.

Someone taught us. We teach others. That is possible because together we form an organization that supports and validates our efforts, and provides the continuity of the training that has proven effective to change people's lives. Clearly there are some that understand that. The GKK (all of us) makes it happen.

The donation was not a spur of the moment kind of impulse. He said he had been putting money aside for a long time for that specific purpose. He has been donating for a while, just delivered it all at once.

And that is sort of how karate works. It donates for as long as one is involved, the residual lasts for a lifetime, and it delivers when needed.

Sometimes it is difficult to express feelings and they manifest in many ways. I could be misinterpreting his motivation as one of gratitude but I don't think so.

He gave a gift in appreciation of the gift he has received.

Common Sense

By Rich Stamper

Albert Einstein (1879-1955) told us: "Common sense is the collection of prejudices acquired by age eighteen". Think so? Seems I read somewhere that Al was pretty intelligent. Maybe, maybe not. Interesting to consider though if one is open minded enough to even consider.

Note that he specified the collection of prejudices – not knowledge, experience, or ideals – prejudices. Consider that for a minute. Or two.

Also, he said by age eighteen. Seems young, but they're called the formative years for a reason.

So...what is common sense? Well, Al Sensei just told us. Another definition is: "A basic ability to perceive, understand, and judge things that are shared by ("common to") nearly all people and can reasonably be expected of nearly all people without need for debate." See any conflict there?

There are a lot of jokes about common sense – or the lack thereof. Seems like a contradiction of terms at times, an oxymoron.

Is there a point you may ask? Huh, it seems I had one. Oh, yeah.....

Each of us was a youngster in karate at one time regardless of our age. And we established a 'collection of prejudices' regarding karate after a few years of study and practice – during our formative years. I know I did. Also, we were all taught pretty much the same stuff, so the "things (karate) that are shared by ('common to') nearly all of us can reasonably be accepted without need for debate." Think so? Sounds right doesn't it.

So, what about the karate things that seem to contradict "common sense"? What about the ones that defy logic? Does our prejudice hold sway so that we defend such things? Interesting to consider.

Wha-cha-talkin-bout there Bub?

Okay, let me provide an example. Consider Furi-Uchi – wielding strike. The way I learned it while in the Goju-Kai and as shown by Gosei Sensei, was to start from the small of the back and whip the arm around hitting with the back of the knuckles of the tightly closed fist. Kind of like rapping on a door with the back of the hand.

Well Sir, that's the way I learned it and the way I taught it and...nobody ever used it. We practiced it a lot though. Common practice, accepted by all in the Goju-Kai - at least fifty years ago.

Now the first circular punch I learned was called "The Hook" in Golden Gloves. Later, I learned pretty much the same circular punch called Mawashi-Zuki while studying Shotokan. In both cases the fist impact area was the same as in a punch

and both were very effective and used a lot. A boxer's hook works – it is natural and very effective. Mawashi-zuki works. Furi-Uchi, not so much. It takes a long time to deliver furi-uchi if the hand has to move to the small of the back first; it is an unnatural to hit with the back of the hand with force; and yet, that is the way it was taught and the way I taught it. Maybe I was just prejudiced. However, I never questioned Furi-Uchi. It was part of the training, it was “shared by, common to” all of us at the time. Common sense.

Sense or prejudice? Think about it. There are other examples, four or five come immediately to mind. Maybe AI was right.

Walk the Walk

By Rich Stamper

NPR (National Public Radio) had a show on the other day where listeners were invited to call in. Well, that happens all of the time, but in this instance the host specified that only callers who were actively involved in improving the situation call in and tell what they were doing and how others could use their experience.

I found that refreshing. Seems everyone has a lot of good ideas about how to fix things but it's just talk in many cases. The old “somebody ought to” thing that we have all heard and maybe even said. I know I have heard it many times.

Anyway, that got me to thinking (scary) about our Annual Meeting several months ago. During the State of the Organization portion of the meeting, I brought up the needs we have as an organization. Several people offered very good suggestions and I said that what we need are volunteers to implement those ideas.

Leadership isn't title or position, it is action and example. The real leaders of the GKK are those who see the needs and take care of them. If all of those who recognize the needs, know of solutions, and actively make them happen the organization would be much further along.

It is easy to say “somebody ought to”. Certainly, there are things not everyone can do and yet need to be done. If a group is required to accomplish a specific goal, then organize that group. If a resource is required then locate that resource and inspire action. My experience is that those who recognize an opportunity are the ones with some experience in that arena and probably the best suited to implement a program.

When I mentioned a specific area we need to improve, a few people offered suggestions. I said those were great ideas - and they were - but what we require is volunteers. We need the ones who raise their hand and say: “I can fix that”.

We are very fortunate for the leadership we have that works tirelessly on our behalf. There are leaders in the GKK at every level and we should all be grateful. Still, there are areas where changes are needed that require fresh ideas and action. If our current leadership could accomplish everything then we wouldn't need improvements. Sometimes one can't do everything, at least not all at once.

Certainly all of the good ideas to enhance the GKK are welcome, but the ideas alone aren't accomplishing anything. We really do need some action. We have had the same goals for the GKK for many years and are not making progress. Anyone, anyone?

We have a very good product and have a lot to offer as an organization. That is not an issue. The problem is we are not getting the word out. Martial Arts is saturated and product differentiation is required to entice the generally unknowing public to participate. That has to happen at every level and has to be an effort made by each GKK member.

If you find a great restaurant or see an exciting movie, you tell your friends. That is a powerful enticement for them. How many of us tell our friends how great karate is? Have we all grown complacent?

You are the future of the GKK. The time to act is now.

Know what? Somebody ought to.....

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