

Sensei Says

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This year's Asian Celebration demonstrations were great successes. I thank all of you who helped the event happen. For those who missed it, we choreographed performances to five different pieces of beautiful Japanese music. A different piece of music was used for each of the programs at BMAI: teens and adults karate/taekwondo, aikido, judo, hapkido, and the children's program.

My slogan was, "our demonstration is so good you can enjoy it with your eyes closed." And the musical choices must have been good, two of the pieces were used during figure skating routines in the Winter Olympics.

The Asian Celebration has become a time for our school to not only show our martial arts techniques to the public, but also for us to demonstrate our commitment to quality and the tenets of the martial arts. It has also become a time for us to get together to share with others the love we have for the arts we practice. It is a chance to spend time with the people we have sweated alongside all year, people who have become more than training partners, people we have grown to call our friends.

As expected, we made some mistakes on stage, and we could have done better (we always can). I, most of all, was focused on the mistakes. I always want to represent the arts to the public in the most professional way. I regretted that we were not better prepared. Fortunately, the blunders went virtually unnoticed by the audience, and they seemed to have truly enjoyed the performances.

An audience can be really tough to please; yet, it is said, "you are your own worst critic." Actually I think it should be, "your sensei is your worst critic." Since I spend so much time correcting my students mistakes, I think this is a good time for me to step back, quit being the perfectionist sensei, and take an audiences view of our school's performances on and off the stage. Here are a few qualities I noticed in the members of our dojo over the Asian Celebration weekend:

LEADERSHIP - Every year my job gets a little bit easier. The students took care of problems before I even knew the problems existed, and I'm sure there were some troubles I never heard about. Whether it was taking care of the tatami, videotape, music, the banner, booth, or figuring out who stands where; every time I went to check on something, somebody was already taking care of it. It was awesome!

RESPECT - It is easy to respect someone who is similar to you, but the ability to respect differences requires a deeper understanding of respect. "Different" does not mean "inferior." And, believe me, some of the other martial arts schools are very different from us! No, BMAI will never offer "Ninja Master Birthday Parties" for kids! Although some students were certainly amazed by how different other schools' techniques, attitudes, and philosophies can be; they understood that honoring those differences was the whole point of the celebration.

ETIQUETTE - After 14 years in Oregon I have yet to see a school show the level of etiquette that my students show. I saw students of mine bowing to instructors from other schools - an unheard of act in many schools! To them, any instructor deserves that level of respect. Their courtesies do not go unnoticed. I am often complemented by other instructors on the politeness my students show them.

DEDICATION - If you put together a photo album of the Asian Celebration demonstrations over the years you would notice a peculiar coincidence. In the photos taken of the BMAI demos you will see that, for the most part, it is the same people year

after year. Unfortunately, in photos from most other schools you wouldn't see many familiar faces from one year to the next. Even their leadership positions change quite often. Currently BMAI has over 80 members who have trained more than three years. (That is the average time it takes to get a black belt in most schools.)

COMMUNITY - For years we have joked about the "Dojo Vortex." You can try to leave, but it will eventually suck you back in. Students can be away for years, and then walk back in the dojo doors like no time ever elapsed. There is something timeless about the sense of caring that this little dojo has created over the years. Many of those people show up each year to see us and watch our demonstrations. Each year, I am reminded of all the incredible people that are a part of our dojo community.

I could go on and on (and usually do), but you have probably already gotten the point – this observer was very impressed by BMAI's performances.

Modesty may be the first of the Five Tenets, but being a part of the Asian Celebration this year made me very proud of my school and my students. I know that pride is a weakness, but I am still young; I will continue to work on humbling myself over the coming years.

-Alan Best