

Sensei Says

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Ask any teacher what the hardest part of teaching is and I'm sure you won't have to listen for long before you hear how hard it is to get motivated students. Teaching is easy if your student is serious; and nearly impossible if the student isn't. A teacher's skill is often based more on his or her ability to motivate than his or her actual knowledge of the subject. The greatest teaching challenge is getting the student to be motivated to learn.

Ask any student what the hardest part of learning is and I'm sure you won't have to listen for long before you hear how hard it is to find a teacher that is motivational. Learning is easy if your teacher takes you seriously; and nearly impossible if your teacher doesn't. A student's skill is usually based more on his or her actual knowledge of the subject than his or her ability to motivate him or herself. The greatest learning challenge is getting a teacher that is motivated to teach.

I'll wait here if you want to read that again!

As a teacher, I feel a strong responsibility to help my students attain their goals. Sometimes, it seems, I want my students to be better even than they want to be!

I remember my teacher, Shigeki Umemoto, explaining to me the great regret I would have if I discovered when I was older that other martial artists had trained harder than I did. He never wanted me to feel that I did not reach my potential, or that I had shied away from my commitment to myself. The intensity with which he trained me showed he was determined that I succeed.

I do not mention this to brag about how hard I trained, rather to point out how serious any teacher should be about his/her student's progress.

During the Summers when I was in high school Sensei Umemoto would be at the dojo at 9 in the morning until 2 in the afternoon for only one reason - to train a small group of dedicated students (which included me). We did not pay him extra for the lessons, except with sweat. After the training we would often be treated to lunch at his house. We mowed his lawn and did any other work we could do so he would have more time with us.

Many of my advanced students are currently undergoing rigorous testing for advancement in Karate-do and Taekwondo. They have spent countless hours honing their techniques, conditioning their bodies, and studying for their written tests.

I pushed six of my students through an exhausting 7 1/2 hour physical examination this past Saturday. Looking out the window I saw a beautiful spring morning. The day passed before my eyes as I called out commands for hour after hour - pushing them to always train harder.

As the sun was setting, and the test finally ended, I thought of all the beautiful days my teacher spent inside a smelly dojo, because he took teaching me seriously.

- Alan Best