



12 First Impressions

We've all heard the old adage that "You only get one chance to make a great first impression." With a martial arts school, you get lots of opportunities to make great first impressions on every student.

Every time a student experiences something for the first time, their reaction to that first impression is much stronger than their reaction to an experience that is familiar to them. So if the initial experience goes well, they really feel it. And if the initial experience doesn't go well, they also feel that with the same intensity.

This provides you with a fantastic opportunity to make raving fans out of your new students and parents. Here is a partial list of the first impressions we can make on just one student/parent:

1. The first time they visit our website - This gives them an immediate impression of what kind of school you run. Suggestion: Ask some of your friends outside of martial arts to give you an honest impression of your website. Does it create the sense that you run a top notch operation?
2. The first time they call your school -This also makes an immediate impression. Not just the initial greeting, but how well the call goes. Did the person who answered the phone build their confidence? When the prospect hung up, did they come away thinking "Wow! That's got to be the best martial arts school in town!"
3. The first time they pull into your parking lot -This is the third powerful first impression before they even set foot in your school. What does the building look like from the outside? Is it very inviting? Is your signage sharp? Is your parking lot clean? What can they see through your windows?
4. The first time they walk in your door - This makes one of the most powerful first impressions of all. Is everything neat and clean? What



does it smell like? Does the overall behavior of students and staff convey the sense that this place is well organized and professional?

5. The first time they are greeted- Your initial greeting grabs and focuses their attention for a moment. They'll form impressions of "what people are like here" from this first encounter. Do they feel ignored, "assaulted" or do they feel genuinely welcomed as they enter your school for the first time.
6. Their first in-depth conversation -This is generally your intro conference. Even if all the other first impressions have gone well so far, they're likely to be just a little anxious. They're in a new place and they really don't know what's going on. Does your intro make them comfortable and set the expectation that they're going to love your program?
7. The first time they step on your mat - Once again, they're likely to be a bit anxious. You have just a few seconds to get them off to a great start. Do you take care to ensure that their first minute on your mat reduces their anxiety and increases their excitement? Do you ensure that they are introduced to your instructors and the other students in their class?
8. The first time they come into the school as a "regular student" - Even if you did a great job getting them started in their first lesson, it's just as important that they have a great experience the next time they come in for class. This will be the first time that they come in without a "guide." If anything goes wrong, they'll feel very awkward. Do you keep an eye out for students coming in for their first regular class, to ensure they find their way without any problems?
9. The first time you have a one-on-one chat with a student or parent after the student has begun their training - Your first one-on-one discussion sets their expectations for all future chats like this. Are your initial one-on-one chats positive experiences for your students?
10. The first time a student experiences a tip test or any preliminary assessment - This is the first time they're being assessed and that



can make anyone a bit nervous . Regardless of how well they know their material, it's vital that they feel treated with respect. This is especially true if they need to improve in any way . Do you handle their first assessment with a little extra empathy and respect?

11. Their first belt test or other formal assessment -While other students may be on their 2nd, 3rd, or 10th time through this routine, students going through this for the first time need a little extra attention to ensure that they are comfortable and excited. Do you give a little extra attention to those who are testing for the first time?

12. The first time they change classes - Unless you keep all students of all ranks together in one class, students will eventually need to move from a beginner class to a more advanced class. This first class change can create several issues if not handled with care. Perhaps the new schedule isn't as convenient. Maybe they're concerned about leaving their friends in the beginner class and training with new people. Do you take a few moments to ensure that this transition goes smoothly?

That's 12 first impressions that virtually every student experiences at your school. You can probably think of others. These initial experiences generate strong reactions. The good news is that you have an opportunity to create a great experience at each of these events. What do you think your retention would be like if every student had a great experience in all of these first impressions?