

GROWING
YOUR SCHOOLBY CHRISTOPHER
RAPPOLDImage by Chris
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**"REPLACE
HARD IMPACT
WITH TOUCH
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30% SPEED
AND 30%
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Sparring Does *Not* Lose Students When You Conduct Your Classes *This* Way

A student gets punched in the nose and starts to bleed. He's embarrassed and fear starts to set in. He thinks to himself, "Maybe this isn't for me."

A woman in her 40s gets partnered up with a 17-year-old boy. Try as she might, she's in a position where she can't do anything. She is self-conscious and feels like she's diminishing his workout.

Another student enjoys the martial arts class until the instructor says, "Everyone get your gear on and find a partner for sparring."

Yet another student secretly hopes to *not* be partnered in sparring class with one particular student who lacks control.

Do any of these scenarios sound familiar? If the answer is yes, then, like many others, you have a very real problem that's killing your effort to grow your school.

Let's face it: Getting a new student isn't easy. It requires time, effort and money. Why, then, would you ever leave to chance a curriculum that isn't focused on retaining a student long term?

The answer lies in two main reasons. "This is the way I was taught, so *that* is what I'm passing on to my students." And, "I didn't know there was a better way that allows me to grow my school while maintaining *and* improving the quality of my students!"

Whichever camp you find yourself in, there's good news. There's a better approach – one that your students will love and that will protect you from the liability associated unstructured training, too. That approach will also protect your retention and let you have students whose sparring skills continue to grow and improve.

The first key is to remember to keep it simple. The best instructors I have trained with have an ability to break skills into the very simplest elements. They naturally come from a place of empathy for the learning level of the student.

Think about this. If you were going to take golf lessons for the first time, who would you rather take lessons from: Tiger Woods or a professional golf instructor? While the idea of taking a lesson from Tiger sounds pretty cool, it might not be the best choice. Someone of Tiger's expertise is most probably very out of touch with what it feels like to be anything but the best golfer in the world. Working with someone not on his level would be a communication challenge.

To this end, the retention-based sparring method I created advocates *teaching only one skill at a time*. Isolating a single technique allows even the most novice student to have a chance to understand what to do, why it's important and how to perform the skill. He or she can work on perfection instead of feeling overwhelmed.

So, always take the time to break down a technique to the simplest of skills. When using this method, keep your focus on students leaving the lesson with one skill they can absolutely understand and use in sparring.

Second, monitor speed and impact. Even when students are working in isolation, they have a tendency to want to go too fast. This creates bad habits and doesn't provide the opportunity for novices to follow along. Also extremely important, replace hard impact with touch pressure. Thirty percent speed and 30 percent power is how to train in sparring without risking injury and this level of training gives you the opportunity to correct unnecessary physical tension in the body.

Have you ever seen a student who spars with his body in a constant state of tension? If so, recognize this for what it truly is: your student's physical expression of fear. If you watch any of the great fighters in any combat sports, you'll see a relaxed body – until it's time to execute a move and then they explode into action. When a student is constantly tense, he or she drains his or her own energy. It makes their moves less efficient and, for the beginner student, traps emotional fear in their muscles. This makes it much harder to get to a place of confidence in sparring.

Take the two approaches I shared above and implement them into your sparring program. If you are already in line with this method, it's always worth doing a double check to ensure that what you think should be happening matches the reality on the floor. ✊