

YOU MESSED
UP! NOW WHAT?

BY KATHY OLEVSKY

"WE CAN HELP ALL OF OUR STUDENTS ACCOMPLISH THEIR GOALS, IF WE CONSIDER HOW WE DELIVER THE INFORMATION RATHER THAN JUST FOCUSING ON STATING THE FACTS."

It's Not *What* You Say, It's *How* You Say It

I've been operating a martial arts school full time for 41 years. I think I may have made every mistake that can be made in this business.

The reason I'm still in business, I believe, is because I asked for help. I learned quickly that others before me had already found solutions. In this reality-based column, I'll point out key mistakes I made in my business career, which are common errors among school owners, both large and small, throughout our industry. Then I'll share the solutions I applied to overcome them.

Have you ever had a parent tell you that her child loves martial arts, but has started complaining about going to class? This is a great opportunity to give the parent a little guidance on getting that attitude changed. It's also a chance for each instructor to test his or her skills at giving that parent advice without sounding condescending.

I had a parent call me about his four-year-old daughter who was enrolled in our pre-school karate classes. She was very happy to be in class until recently. They had a family issue that caused them to miss class for a few weeks. Now the four-year-old was giving them a little push back about attending karate.

I asked if his daughter was in preschool for the first year, which, in fact, she was. She was going to school from 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Then dad was picking her up and bringing her to our 5:30 class.

She was complaining that she missed her mom and just wanted to go home. Of course, that tears at the heartstrings of any parent. Consequently, they were going directly home after preschool.

Several things are happening here. The child who had been used to being with mom all day long was now away from her for eight hours, which seems like an eternity to her. Similarly, the fun of karate class had been forgotten over the few weeks of absences.

I suggested to the mom that they plan an after-school event, and that it would require completing some job as a favor for the mom. The plan was, the dad was going to pick her up from school on Monday and they would come to the school for karate, then to the store to pick up the milk that mom needed. It would be the four-year-old's job to remind dad to get the milk after karate and take it home to mom.

Of course, we were now telling her she was going to karate class, but *it was how we told her that made it work.*

I also told the dad to be a "good finder" at the end of class. So often, we hear about a child come running out of class happy she earned their blue stripe. But then, the parent ruins the moment by telling her if she had paid attention for the *entire* class, she might have gotten her other stripe, too! The dad's instruction in this case was to find one thing she did well in class and comment on it.

There are adult students in our schools who need a critique from time to time. Some, for example, have a few pounds to lose.

In a recent staff meeting, we were discussing how to help an overweight adult realize he needed to trim down before accomplishing his goal of black belt. We came to the consensus that we needed to make it a "fitness goal" rather than a "weight-loss goal."

All of our black belt candidates have certain fitness requirements to reach before they can train in our Deputy Black Belt class. In our school, they must be able to perform 10 katas in a row at a normal performance speed, without the need for a break. I know some other martial arts schools, too, that require some students to complete a run in a certain time limit.

We can help all of our students accomplish their goals, *if we consider how we deliver the information rather than just focusing on stating the facts.* ✦