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Breaking Through With Your Students

by Master Terry Wisniewski

How many times have you been teaching a student and they just... don't ... get it?? I mean they go through the motions with decent technique, but there is no power, no snap. You know that if they tried to use it for self-defense, it would be ineffective.

It's frustrating and dangerous; frustrating to the instructor, because they are not getting through to the student. For some reason, they cannot motivate the student to really go for it, or the student just can't find the right muscles to contract to make the technique effective. It's dangerous for the student who goes away and either somewhat believes they "can do it if they had to," or simply doesn't think the technique can work for them. If a student begins to internalize this gap between what the instructor wants and what they can execute, commitment to training softens and the school may lose this student.

So you explain and demonstrate the technique, again. You direct the student to divide the movement into bite-size, progressive actions. You verbally fix their attempts, and then you physically guide them through the motion. And they still don't get it.

So how do you fulfill your responsibilities, keep your integrity, and feel that you have actually prepared this person to face a physically violent confrontation?

Breaking to Break Through

One of the quickest solutions is to have the student execute the technique by attempting to break a board. When they fail to break, the student begins to feel what the instructor has been communicating. They gain a visceral understanding that decent technique is not enough. He or she realizes that they must act decisively with power and speed to accomplish the instructor's teaching. Board breaking becomes a real test of successfully executing a technique. Fo-

cus, set, prepare, and explode with power and confidence. And POW, the board snaps. Suddenly, the student "gets it." They gain confidence. They get excited. The student becomes a tiger.

While I was visiting the ATA headquarters in Little Rock, Arkansas, in October, I had the pleasure to train with Master Skiles, their instructor trainer. It was a great session and a pleasure to watch him work. He's using a drill that uses board breaking to prove to the student that they've learned the technique he was teaching. This type of exciting and fulfilling drill is perfect to include in your self-defense classes.

Here's how Master Skiles incorporates board breaking to teach a self-defense combination response to an attacker attempting to grab the defender: First, he divided the group into partners. Then, he demonstrated and had them practice the combination in a progressive fashion (learning and applying one move then, once understood, adding the next and then another until the combination was complete). The combination Master Skiles taught was to shift back away from someone attempting to grab your torso, while simultaneously slapping the attacker's grasping hands downward. Then slide in and forward to execute a front elbow smash to the face (which later became a board break!), then he continued forward and sideways to execute a dodging turning/roundhouse kick to the common peroneal nerve with the shin. Included in the group was an adult male who had never broken a board in his life or had any previous martial arts experience. By the end of the drill, the white belt student had smashed a black board and was grinning with pride and confidence. What a way to get the message across and keep students motivated!

Remember, if you hit a wall with your students, break through by breaking. **TW**



The student prepares to meet attacker. He steps back and slaps attackers hands down.



Now stepping forward, the student executes a front elbow strike to the face of the attacker.



To complete the exercise, the student continues forward, executing a dodging turning kick to the common peroneal nerve with the shin.

• Master Terry Wisniewski is a 7th degree Black Belt in ITF Taekwon-Do and founder of Tien Lung Taekwon-Do. He is a full time professional Taekwon-Do instructor with three schools. As a 9-time coach for Team Canada he has trained World Champions in Patterns, Self Defense & Power Breaking.