


Integrity & Credibility

Get Those Hip-Boots On!

by: George Kirby

One of the problems of having a videotape series supported by written instructional materials is the constant possibility of someone claiming false rank after “viewing” the videotapes. I am not alone in having this problem. It is amazing how many “videotape” sensei there are floating around who do not know one end of a tatami from the other. This is a problem faced by many top sensei who have instructional videotape series.

For that reason I periodically use a major internet search engine (go, Google, Metacrawler, etc.) to search out the word “budoshin.” It is really amazing how many sites come up. Some pertain to budoshin on the philosophical level. Some pertain to Budoshin Ju-Jitsu, my website and references or links to it. Sometimes there is a site that does not have anything to do with martial arts. Then there is the occasional “budoshin jujitsu” sensei, claiming rank. *Bingo!*

Amazingly, I have never heard of most of these people. Some claim to have “studied” the art — whatever that means. Because they have “studied” the art they are now qualified to “teach” it. Gee — I wish life was so simple. It would sure be nice if I could observe a karate or aikido class and then claim to be qualified to teach it.

I have even run into a few who claim 3rd or 4th dan in Budoshin Ju-Jitsu. Wow! Some even get other organizations to recognize their ranks. Phenomenal! How do they accomplish this? I don’t know. However, it sure raises questions with respect to those organiza-

tions' integrity and credibility. There are even organizations on the internet that say, "send me your money and we will send you your yudansha certificate." Some organizations will even grant recognition in different ryu even though there is no one in the organization qualified to do so. It is sort of like the "university diploma by mail" scam. In all fairness, there are some organizations that will cross-check with me (or the AJA) before issuing a certificate of rank.

“Technical knowledge and acquiring credible rank are two entirely different things.”

It is possible to study videotapes on your own (with an uke) and if you are both sufficiently skilled, learn some techniques. However, technical knowledge and acquiring credible rank are two entirely different things. Anyone who has been in a formal learning environment knows the difference. However, there are those who believe that watching a videotape and practicing a few moves makes them qualified. What is even worse is that their students believe them.

How do I deal with the problem? Very simply: I contact the person. Sometimes they received a promotion from one of my black belts and that resolves the problem. Fortunately I have kept records of all students I have promoted to yudansha grades. It is usually easy to verify these promotions. I congratulate the person and then they use me as a resource as well as their sensei.

Sometimes a self-promoted person is really shocked to hear from me. They want to know how "I" found out about "them". It is sort of a defensive reaction to distract me from the issue at hand: is their rank legitimate? Once "caught", they are usually quite apologetic, agree not to use the name "Budoshin Ju-Jitsu" (in writing) and life goes on. On rare occasion I have to come on very strong, advising them that "Budoshin Ju-Jitsu" is part of a registered trademark and their use of the term for personal financial gain or abuse of the name for purposes of misrepresentation could put them in a lot of legal hot water. I have only had to be heavy-handed once or twice. Politeness and professionalism usually win out.

The AJA has had an effective policy to deal with this problem for many years. Any sensei wishing membership must provide information about the source of his promotion as well as the promotional criteria. In some cases the promoting sensei or organization is contacted. Sometimes their credentials are even checked. This may seem a little extreme. However, there are abuses and the AJA's credibility is at stake. Fortunately there is a lot of cooperation in this area among credible ju-jitsu organizations.

Where does this leave the general public? In hip boots. As instructors and organizations we have a responsibility to maintain high standards and be intolerant of abuses. The public expects this of us and has a right to do so. If they are going to be in hip boots the water they are wading in should be as clear as possible. They should be able to see their feet.

As sensei, we have to maintain the vigil for the general public. This is our responsibility; it is part of the package. As a student, you need to keep your eyes open for abuses. This is America. Anyone can go out and buy a black belt, create a certificate, and go into business. Most sensei are legitimate. However, it's the few bad apples that can ruin an entire barrel.

My search this time turned up three "budoshin" blackbelts I've never heard of. I will be checking them out. I will do another internet search in six months to see if anything else turns up. It is a sad commentary on the martial arts community that I have to do this. On the other hand, it is part of my responsibility as a credible sensei.

Professor George Kirby, 10th Dan, is the Chairman of the AJA Board of Directors.

Copyright © 2001 AJA Newsletter. First published in the AJA Newsletter, Summer, 2001.

Reprinted by permission.

American Jujitsu Association

www.AmericanJujitsuAssociation.org