

PAYING THE PRICE?

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Can karate teaching be categorized as a profession? The answer depends on the definition of a profession. There are as many meanings of the terms “profession” and “professional” as there are people. In the broadest sense they may be used to mean any occupation by which a person earns a living. In the most restricted sense they include only “the three learned professions” of theology, law, and medicine.

Most people would group their interpretation somewhere between these two extreme ends of the spectrum. However, you must ask yourself, “what differentiates a profession from an ordinary vocation?” Naturally, if you ask yourself this question, then you must ask yourself, “what are the conditions?”

Irrespective of how you slice it, two factors will emerge from this questioning and they are: developing the skills necessary for application after intensive and systematic learning of a body of knowledge; and accreditation by an institution and conformity to an established body of standards regulating professional and personal behavior.

Although some attention has been given to the development of professional standards in karate, no such standards have been systematized or accepted. In karate, as in the other cognate arts, for example there is no Hippocratic Oath or similar vow of service to which a karateka must swear witness before he can practice his “vocation.” Some organizations, do set forth norms of behavior and enforce them, but most organizations do not have such control.

Irrespective of whether a karate teacher achieves formal professional status, the most basic elements of professionalization are germane to the problem. Most important is the development of skill in teaching. This is acquired through education and experience in the dojo. Some students of karate and the other cognate arts, do not realize this and believe Their sole function in the dojo is to learn self-defense and try to get a black belt in order to rush out and open a dojo.

They regard with repugnance the idea of helping out in any manner, shape or form in the dojo and rationalize their activities by saying that they are paying to learn. In a way, they may be right; if it ends there. But this same individual will go out and open a dojo with no other qualification than the fact that he has spent an X number of hours and a Y number of monies learning self-defense. This to him is enough.

With the temerity of the Mongol Khans, this half-baked combination of ill-mannered, ill-trained and ill-advised type of individual will proclaim himself to the unsuspecting public that he is the best - a professional’s professional. This is the problem.

What are the standards in karate? Needless to say, we do not have to engage in an academic discussion of Bushido. This subject has been thoroughly ventilated by the number of material flooding the market and it would be useless to add a “sum of more” to that which already probably has too much. However, Bushido notwithstanding, what standards should we accept? Unfortunately, at this moment it appears to make the Herculean task of cleaning the Augean stables tame by comparison.

Few people want to pay the costly price, the painstaking and time-consuming road leading to a profession. The development of the skills necessary for application after intensive and systematic learning, and conformity to an established body of standards regulating professional and personal behavior appears too high a price.