

People x Taekwon-Do = Metamorphosis

By Gary A. Bossé - 7th Dan, USTF-7-37

People multiplied by Taekwon-Do equals metamorphosis (PxT=M). Is it true that people who practice Taekwon-Do become a human metamorphosis? Let's see: According to Webster a metamorphosis is, MET-A-MOR-PHO-SIS (A transformation – a marked change in appearance, character, condition, or function). Well, very interesting, we'll come back to it later.

Everyday thousands of children are born around the world. Have you ever noticed young children in their behavior and when playing with others? Young children are so pure and so innocent, they only know good. As the child grows older, they learn a multitude of negative things. Such as anger, frustration, hatred, prejudice, rudeness, selfishness, conceit and all of the other things that make people unpleasant to be around. Anyway, you get the picture. Now, any one or two of these negative traits can hold us back on the road of life. So, by the time we become adults, we can be totally nonfunctional.

On the other hand, some people are merely physically uncoordinated or lack the self-confidence needed to accomplish goals in their life. It may be as little as going out to the store at night by oneself, for fear of being harassed or attacked, or as far as standing up for your civil and or moral rights against enormous odds (like your family and friends or peer pressure).

When I was a teenager growing up in a small town of 2000 in Old Town, Maine, during the late 50's and early 60's, I was left out of a lot of activities because I was very poor, small and wore glasses. When the kids at school would choose sides for games, I would be the last one chosen only to make the sides even. If there was an odd number, guess who did not get to play.

After graduating from high school in 1962, my friend and I joined the army. We joined the U.S. Paratroopers, GUNG-HO all the way. Everyone said that there was no way that I was going to make it. No way, for a guy that looked like a nerd to a rough tough paratrooper. No one looked past the glasses to see the burning desire to be someone.

After graduating from jump school at Ft. Benning, GA, in January of 1963, I was sent to the famous 82nd Airborne Division at Ft. Bragg, NC. What does all of this have to do with Taekwon-Do? Hang tough, I'm getting there. I was having a great time in the Army. Three square meals a day, a place to live, lots of exercise, and they even paid me for it. In September of 1963, I made corporal and that's when the trouble started. Now I had to start bossing people around. In January of 1964 I was reassigned to Korea. I was so mad. There wasn't any U.S. Paratrooper units stationed in Korea, and I wanted to be a paratrooper. Little did I know that this was a blessing in disguise. In May of 1964, I was promoted to sergeant. There I was, a small 20 year old skinny kid, who looks like 17, trying to order a lot of wise guys around. I felt like Rodney Dangerfield. I got no respect. Yeah, about that time, this smaller than me Korean

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guy named Mr. Kim opened a Taekwon-Do class right on our compound. You bet I signed up. After a few months of training I didn't have any more trouble from those guys. Not that I was all that great in Taekwon-Do but the fact that I was studying it and they weren't going to take a chance. It worked for me. I received my red belt and fell in love. Went back a second time to Korea. I got my black belt and got married to the nicest Korean lady in the world. Went back to Korea a third time after getting wounded in Vietnam with a shattered hip bone, and continued my Taekwon-Do training despite part of my hip bone being removed. Got my 2nd Dan in 1970.

From 1976 to 1978, I had the great pleasure of teaching Taekwon-Do to the U.S. Army in Hawaii. We had a class of 76 students that we would teach 8 hours a day, 5 days a week for 4 months. Our goal was to make instructors out of them so that they could start a unit program in their units in lieu of regular physical training. Like General Choi did in the Korean Army. Can you imagine an entire unit of black belts? Some of the units didn't want to lose a good soldier for 4 months so they sent us someone who had no potential (in their opinion), and after 4 months of rigorous Taekwon-Do training from my 7 instructors and myself, we transformed those 76 white belts into highly motivated, take charge red belts.

The greatest pleasure I have in teaching Taekwon-Do is to see the awesome change that it makes in people's lives.

Let's look at some alarming statistics. 80% of people are not interested in anything more than what they already have or are doing. Only 20% are looking for a change, and out of this just 10% are willing to do something about it and only 1% to 2% will achieve whatever it is that they want. For example, at the turn of the century 90% of the people owned their own business and 10% worked for someone else. Today, 10% of the people own their own business and 90% work for someone else. 80% of these people do not like their job or their boss. However, only 20% of these unhappy people are willing to look for a change. Only 10% will actually make a change and only 1% to 2% are willing to work hard enough to be successful. If this is true in everything, then it is also true with Taekwon-Do. That means that for every 100 students that come through the door to practice Taekwon-Do, only 1% or 2% will work hard enough to achieve a black belt. That's good news for those of you that have achieved a black belt. Congratulations, that gives you a big advantage.

Let's look at this metamorphosis in slow motion. Example #1: A mother brings her six year old son into your Taekwon-Do class and signs him up. We explain that white belt represents emptiness, in Taekwon-Do meaning that they don't know anything, which he probably doesn't understand anyway. We soon find out that the six year old student lacks self-confidence and isn't very athletic. He's a mama's boy (had a very sheltered life). We train for a couple of months and he learns all that is required for his gold stripe. Class by now is becoming

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monotonous. Doing the same thing over and over. He tests and receives his gold stripe. Now he gets to learn something new and gets to free-spar with the rest of the class. His mother remarks that her son really likes Taekwon-Do and she can already see a difference in her son. A couple of more months go by and he receives his gold belt. We tell him that gold represents the earth which is like our mother. We are born from the earth and when we die we go back to the earth. At this time he just accepts it as fact. At the gold belt level, everyone can see the difference. He is gaining self-confidence and he is getting coordinated. He gets his green stripe then his green belt, which represents growing in both knowledge and skill, like the green trees and vegetation that grows from mother earth. At the blue belt level there is a mark difference in this young man. We tell him that blue belt represents reaching for higher heights. Like the trees reaching up to the sky. His mother says her son cannot wait to go to class, he just loves "Karate". I say with a warm smile, it's Taekwon-Do and she apologizes. At the blue belt level he has a lot of self-confidence free sparring with the lower belts, but is still timid with the higher belts. Even though his techniques are just as good or even better. It's that mental gap. Four months go by and he gets his red stripe. Another four months and he gets his red belt. YEAH! He has made it to red belt. Red belt is the biggest transformation so far. Red means danger, caution, beware, watch out for. As a red belt, he knows he is good, he knows he can whip anyone his age and size anywhere, anytime. He has no fear. His stuff doesn't stink. This is why we say red is danger. At this level he has skill and power and wants to show everyone how good he is. That makes him dangerous to himself and to others around him. Four months go by and he receives his black stripe. One step from his black belt. He now starts to help teach the lower belts and learns how to become a leader. Six months later he tests for his junior black belt and gets it. Black is the opposite of white. We started with a white piece of paper that was empty and filled it with all of the basics of Taekwon-Do. Now that he knows the alphabet of Taekwon-Do, the task of learning to read lies ahead. His mom is overwhelmed with his achievements and can't believe that was her little mama's boy just four years ago.

Example #2: A cocky young man joins your Taekwon-Do class. You can see from the beginning that all he wants to learn is how to fight. So you tell him that he came to the right place. You know different. Same routine as the 6 year old kid, you tell him what the belt colors mean and you explain the philosophy of Taekwon-Do. As you explain the meaning of the patterns you can see that he is not interested. You explain them anyway and require him to memorize them. He is upset that he cannot free-spar until after his first test. He practices hard so that he can test and he does. He finds that free-sparring is fun but everyone is kicking his butt, especially the higher belts. He loses some of his cockiness. He is athletic and learns quickly. He progresses through the gold and green belts and is doing really well. He is still having a lot of trouble with the red and black belts. You reassure him that he will get there someday. Even faster if he were more coachable and listened to what you tell him. He gets his

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blue belt, then his red belt. Oh yeah? The red belt, I'm bad. All his cockiness comes back. After all, this is what he came here for. He has lots of techniques, lots of power but no control, definitely dangerous. He is clearly one of the best fighters in the class, except those two black belts who still mop the floor with him. He keeps training hard until that magic day when he gets his black belt. We all congratulate him and say, "Now that you've learned all the basics, you can begin your Taekwon-Do training." He helps teach the class and one day a cocky young man walks in.

Example #3: A middle age man joins your Taekwon-Do class, because he has always wanted to learn but could never find the time, so he joins with his son. You can see that he is a professional person and has not been physically active most of his life. With studying and work consuming most of his time, you tell him that we will go at his pace. With the white belt tied tight around his waist, you begin training. He listens to every word you say and tries to do everything perfect. The lack of physical agility and coordination just won't allow it. The harder he tries the more frustrated he gets. You tell him, it's OK, you're doing good for an old man. Both of you laugh. When he starts to free-spar, he feels like a total klutz. Even the kids are doing a number on him. Then you remind him how many years it took him to get out of shape and that it will take a little longer to get back in. Just relax and take it as it comes. At gold belt he is feeling pretty good about himself. He even loosens his belt enough to breathe. Green belt shows a real difference in ability and he is enjoying the class. You even see him helping some of the other students. Blue belt brings more skill, better coordination and a sense of self-confidence, like he could handle himself in an emergency. His wife is very pleased with him. After receiving his red belt, as far as he is concerned, he has reached his goal. He is really into teaching others at this point. You have to give him something new to learn or he will take over your class. He is doing really great and is a shining example for others to emulate, young and old alike. By the time he gets his black belt the world will have another dedicated instructor. Now his black belt is tied with a little slack in it.

Does Taekwon-Do transform people? Absolutely! Taekwon-Do can take a 6 year old mama's boy and change him into a confident young man with leadership abilities. Taekwon-Do gives you the self-discipline, confidence and independence to go your own way and do your own thing. Taekwon-Do gives a young lady or woman the freedom not to be afraid, because of their ability to defend themselves. Taekwon-Do transforms the bully into a peacemaker. Taekwon-Do allows the strong to be humble, the weak to be strong and crosses all barriers of race, religion and social classes. Taekwon-Do is a perfect mixture of mind and body. Taekwon-Do can even take a skinny kid with glasses, from Old Town, Maine and transform him into a 7th Degree International Taekwon-Do Instructor.