

Seishin Shotokan

精神

Karate

The Hidden Costs of Choosing the Wrong Style of Martial Arts

A lot of people nowadays are getting into the martial arts and choosing a school without even knowing which style of martial arts the school teaches. Some schools are not totally clear on what their style is as many are practicing and teaching a hybrid mix of multiple arts. Is this a problem? Should you know which style you practice? Are clearly lineated styles even important? The easy answer to all of these questions is yes and no. Unfortunately there are hidden costs involved in choosing the wrong style of martial arts. Here's why:

Choosing a style based on popularity rather than something that fits your personal strengths

Just because a style is the most popular thing going doesn't mean that it is right for you. Taekwondo has held the interest of many a young person due to its dynamic and spectacular kicks. If you are athletic and flexible then this might be the art for you but if you have bad knees and worse hamstrings, then think twice. Not too long ago, Tae Bo was the big thing. At first glance some people thought this was a martial art, especially as the founder Billy Blanks was a former karate champion. However, some of them were disappointed to find out that Tae Bo was a new style aerobic workout using martial arts techniques that has little to no self-defense value. More recently Mixed Martial Arts has become hugely popular and the Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC) is attracting record numbers on its Pay-Per-View events. Consequently, many young people are hoping to ride the next wave of popular martial arts. However if you want to keep your good looks, straight nose and nicely-shaped ears you might want to reconsider. The bottom line is that you should try to find a martial art that matches your strengths and not your weaknesses.

Picking a martial art that has conflicting values with your core beliefs

The majority of martial arts have a certain amount of traditional "baggage" that comes with them. This "baggage" can sometimes include some rather esoteric practices and mystical thinking that you may or may not be comfortable with. Most people are able to accept these practices at face value and in many cases the various martial arts schools water down some of the stranger customs and forms of etiquette in the interest of blending in with our popular culture. Some people however feel that their own personal religious preferences and ideals are being compromised and therefore can feel a little uncomfortable. If this description fits you at all then you might want to check out your chosen style's practices and customs before you make your final decision. This factor is usually not an issue but it doesn't hurt to check out this aspect of your martial art beforehand.

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Enrolling in a martial arts school based on price rather than quality

This factor can work for you and against you. There is no regulation in the martial arts industry that defines what standards a good school should uphold. Also there are a wide range of martial artists who are full-time commercial school owners and some who are part-time hobbyists. Most people's perception is that the more expensive the school the better the martial art. Sometimes this is true but sometimes the local community center has a great martial artist offering a great service. Expensive schools usually offer excellent training facilities and great customer service together with well-structured programs. Cheaper schools or classes generally offer not so great facilities and sometimes not so great instruction but very often there are some hidden gems to be discovered. Don't overlook these people just because of price. Conversely don't overlook the big schools because they are "too expensive". Make your decision based on quality and not price.

Opening the Yellow Pages and choosing a karate school just because the ad looked good

Looks can be deceiving and just because an ad in the Yellow Pages looks good doesn't mean that the karate school is the right one for you. It just means that they are better at marketing and design than some of the other schools listed in the same pages. Check into a few of the schools by calling them and visiting them and then make your decision. It might end up that you still go to the school with the cool ad and that's fine, but at least you looked around a little first.

So what is the moral of the story? Do your research first, before you begin your martial arts practice! A little extra time spent up front will more than likely pay dividends later. The martial arts often turns into a lifetime endeavor. You probably won't be too happy if you spend some significant time practicing a certain style of martial arts only to find out that there is nowhere else to go unless you change your style. I speak from personal experience here so please listen to what I'm saying. I spent the first ten years of my martial arts practice studying a style of karate that had been invented by my instructor.

I was lucky because this particular instructor was actually very good at the martial arts and had developed his style based on what he felt was the best from some of the mainstream karate styles. Consequently, when he decided to end his study of the martial arts due to family commitments, the transition into my current style of Shotokan Karate was not too difficult due to the similarities with my first style of karate. Fortunately I have few regrets based on the life lessons I received from my first instructor. Some of you may be less fortunate and will have to change altogether!

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