

How to Choose a Martial Arts School

by Tom Callos & Shared by Sensei Dan & The**DOJO**

So many martial arts schools and so little time! How does one choose the right one? Here are some inside tips to help you to pick the right school – for the right reasons, from Tom Callos, a veteran school owner and consultant to the martial arts industry.

Martial arts schools are everywhere! If you live in the U.S., chances are you have at least one school within a 5-mile radius of your home - and probably more. There are estimated to be more than six million martial arts practitioners in North America, about 70% of those are children. Today's martial arts schools range from operations that rival the polish and fancy facilities of the nation's finest health club chains to schools that look like the set of *The Last Samurai* to down and-dirty "garage dojos." Price ranges in the martial art industry, according to Frank Silverman, Director of the Martial Arts Industry Association, average out at about \$125 per month, but most schools can be found charging anywhere from \$35.00 per month to more than \$300. How does one go about choosing the right school? Industry expert Tom Callos, a veteran school owner himself, has some great advice on how to choose a martial arts school that's right for you. "The first thing to know about choosing a martial arts school is that you already know how to do it," says Callos.

"You evaluate a martial arts school the same way you would evaluate any school you would take your child to. Just because you're thinking of joining a school that teaches the "ancient arts of self defense," doesn't mean you don't apply modern day scrutiny to their professionalism, teachers, and facilities."

Callos asserts that being a black belt, at any level, is not a sign that the wearer is a good teacher or that he or she knows how to run a business. "Just because someone is a good athlete, doesn't mean they are going to give you your money's worth when it comes to lessons," warns Callos. "Parents should use their good judgment when choosing a school, as just like in the martial arts, there aren't really any secrets, it's all about mastering the fundamentals. If you're looking for a good school, look for one that's proficient at the fundamentals of customer service."

Read our nine tips:

Callos offers nine other school-hunting tips:

The Facility

Just like any business, the way the facility looks and its cleanliness (or lack thereof) says something about the attitude and aptitude of the owner. A martial arts school doesn't have to look like a Starbucks, but it ought to be clean and organized. If a school doesn't look professional, chances are it isn't.

The Staff

Just like you would expect from any business, the staff of a martial arts school should be courteous, professional, and personable. They should treat you (and/or your child) like a paying customer. If you can go to a department store and get better service than you can at your local martial arts school, then spend your money at the department store.

The Attitude

Bad attitude = bad school; if you get a weird feeling, a sort of "attitude" from the staff or owner that rubs you the wrong way, then you shouldn't become a customer of that school. If the attitude of the owner is superb and his or her staff exhibits a similar attitude, then you've found a school worth a second look.

The Style

When shopping for a martial arts school, the "style" the school teaches is secondary to who teaches the classes and how they teach them. A good instructor will make you feel good about what you're doing. He or she will help you stay healthy and take an interest in why you've joined the school. If you're a complete novice to the martial arts, don't shop for a style or method, shop for the best teacher or teachers (read: the best people) you can find. Find the right teacher and you'll love the martial arts. Find the wrong teacher and it won't matter what style they teach.

The Students

Lots of intermediate and advanced students in classes? Chances are you've found a school that knows how to enroll and keep its students; that's a good sign. If you go to a school that's been in business for a year or longer and it's still empty, something's not right with the school. Most martial arts teachers think their classes are the best classes - the way that most restaurateurs think that their food is the best food. If the parking lot is empty, it's a sign that the customers have a different opinion.

The Financial Arrangements

Many martial arts schools will ask you to sign a contract for a certain number of lessons and/or for a certain amount of time – and that's ok, as a school has to sell its wares and generate cash flow just like any other business. You shouldn't think twice about signing a contract with a school, under the following conditions:

1. You've had adequate time to witness and experience the service the school provides. Most schools have a great sales pitch, but some aren't able to follow through with the level of service they promise. Nine out of 10 schools will allow you to try a month of lessons, for a price, before you agree to enroll for a certain number of classes or months. If you can't negotiate this trial period, it's a definite red flag. Bonus Tip: Most schools will have a Pay In Full option on membership. It's ok to pay for your membership in full, but make sure you know the school

thoroughly before doing so. Most schools will have a no-refund policy.

2. The contract you sign should spell out, clearly and exactly, how you leave the program should you have to leave or if you become dissatisfied with the service. It's ok to pay a little exit fee or some other penalty should you decide to leave before fulfilling the terms of a contract, but the penalty or penalties shouldn't be unreasonable (and some are, so check carefully). Nine out of 10 schools will, if you insist, write a special "exit clause" on your contract spelling out the terms of your departure and they will also be willing to strike out parts of a contract if you don't feel comfortable with the verbiage. Bonus Tip: The way the owner or staff member treats you should you try to negotiate a trial period or a change in the school's contract will give you a very clear idea of what the school's service is really like, after the sale. If you're not treated with respect, go elsewhere.

The Service

There's service, then there's good service, and then there's excellent service. Just because the owner or staff member of a martial arts school has the ability to make you beg for mercy with his or her baby toe, doesn't mean they have the right provide you with anything but the best service they can muster. If you visit a martial arts school and you don't see or feel a reasonably high level of customer service happening, raise that suspicious eyebrow, step back a bit, and do some further analysis.

The Feeling You Get When You're There and When You Leave

Are you having fun? Do you leave the school feeling empowered and taken care of? If you go to a martial arts school and leave feeling better than when you arrived, you've found a good thing.

Your Gut Instinct

Always go with your gut instinct when choosing a school or instructor. If your intuition says something's not right, something's not right. If you've found a good school, you'll know it (especially if you've read this article).

Tom Callos is a professional consultant to the martial arts industry.

He is also a co-founder of www.911aok.com, an Acts of Kindness character development program for children and adults.

He resides Hilo, Hawaii Contact Tom Callos UltimateBlackBeltTest.com

Sensei Dan Rominski and his school TheDOJO in Rutherford NJ is referred to the reader as a HIGHLY recommended martial arts school to attend by Tom Callos. Sensei Dan & TheDOJO meet & exceed all of the qualifications of this article for safety, professionalism & martial arts quality. Sensei Dan Rominski is a Member & Graduate of programs by Tom Callos such as the Ultimate Black Belt Test & The 100 and other teacher training education.