

## The Dojo is Yours to Learn From and Make a Difference in

By Shihan Ken Hoggart (05 Jan 04)

Recently I was explaining the ways of the Dojo to an associate of mine that was not familiar with the martial arts. As I was explaining many of the unwritten customs, it occurred to me that although many of us involved in the martial arts learn these customs, we don't always understand why or what it means in the bigger picture. With that said, let us put some thought into some of our customary ways.

The title of this article can be intermixed with a few other things in our lives. The word "Dojo" can be substituted for "The World" or just "Life". Simply put, most of us desire to learn life skills that will make our lives better, easier, and hopefully contribute something back into society. Some of us learn advanced business skills and then turn around and put those skills to use by volunteering to an organization that can use those skills to help those less fortunate. Others, such as movie stars and celebrities, may use their fame to help raise awareness or finances for a good cause. Regardless of how, this is done by many people. We learn from life and try to better ourselves and then put those skills back into society. Hence, society grows and we all evolve.

Now the Dojo is very similar, should we choose to look at it from that perspective. I say that because there are a small few that think that the Dojo is there to provide them with a service. Yes, we do provide a service, but it is much more than learning how to defend, fight, or be tougher. We teach many other things such as, respect, compassion, honor, loyalty, and discipline, and that is just the beginning. In the advanced ranks there are such skills as, managing people, negotiation, building business relationships, communication skills, and mentoring.

We speak of the martial arts as becoming a way of life and this is so true for many of us who have been studying for quite some time. What we learn in the Dojo helps us in our personal and professional lives. We learn and apply such things as, when to speak, when to listen, when to act (and when not to react), and generally how to behave around others. Now once we learn this in the Dojo, it is our responsibility to pass this on to others, typically to the newer students, so that they can in turn learn the "ways". Hence, our concept of learning and contributing those lessons back into the source of the said learning.

After reading this article take a few moments to reflect back on what you have learned in the Dojo, regardless of your rank, and think about how you have applied that into your personal or professional life. Now think about how you may have made your contribution, by putting those skills back into the Dojo. We can all make a difference if we look at things from the right perspective.