

How to Stay in Karate

Something appeals to you about karate. Otherwise, you wouldn't be in it right now. You have worked and sweated through many classes, paid for it all in bumps, bruises, strains and pains as well as hard cash, and you have packed your brain with information on a variety of martial arts subjects. You may well be in the best physical shape you've ever been in. You've made new friends, met a lot of interesting people, built up your confidence and self-esteem to unprecedented levels, and are able to protect yourself far beyond the ability of the average person. Karate has been good for you.

Clearly it is in your best interest to maintain your involvement in karate for a lifetime. To quit would be to suffer the gradual loss of many of the benefits you have worked so hard to achieve. Karate is not something that stays with you forever, like knowing how to ride a bicycle. It is more like speaking French or playing tournament-level chess. If neglected, the skills tend to fade. So spend a little time in contemplation on the place karate has in your life and how you can maintain it.

For starters, here is a list of ten suggestions in each of four categories for things to do that will help keep your motivation humming along enjoyably, and keep karate burn-out at bay:

I. Your Training and Study Program

1. Do some independent study (books, tapes)
2. Learn some katas outside of your system
3. Branch out into weapons, grappling, etc.
4. Study the Oriental Healing arts
5. Take some classes in the Japanese language
6. Attend some class at a different dojo
7. Attend a seminar somewhere
8. Get into weight training
9. Take a break to play another sport
10. Learn meditation

II. Your Mental Health

1. Keep setting new goals and challenges
2. Avoid negativity (complaining, dwelling on problems)
3. Avoid political entanglements in the dojo, the system, the federation
4. Expect the up and down cycles, and take them in stride
5. Remain humble
6. Get a life; don't be karate-obsessive
7. Embrace boredom as a Zen exercise
8. Avoid craving promotion; enjoy the now
9. Make the conscious decision to be happy
10. Visualize success

III. Your Physical Health

1. Eat right, take vitamins as necessary
2. Get plenty of sleep
3. Minimize stress, be mellow
4. Train but don't strain
5. Utilize the necessary safety equipment
6. Observe all safety precautions
7. Always warm up before practicing
8. Get plenty of aerobic exercise
9. Get fresh air and sunshine
10. Avoid tobacco and drug abuse

IV. Your Relationships

1. Help out in lower-rank classes
2. Join the dojo "family"
3. Socialize periodically with the dojo group
4. Join the dojo tournament competition team
5. Be karate-ecumenical, visit other dojos
6. Make friends with karate-ka of other systems
7. Help out as a volunteer at tournaments
8. Take an active part assuring the welfare of the dojo
9. Encourage friends to take up karate
10. Enroll your family members, train together

A particularly critical precaution to take is: Plan to continue advancing in karate *after* achieving your black belt. Many people become so focused on attaining their shodan (first-degree black belt) rank that when they finally achieve it they feel suddenly directionless. Remember that there is ten times as much left to learn *after* getting to the black belt level as there was in getting there. A large percentage of new black belts quit before achieving second dan. If you persevere where others quit you will truly be ahead of the pack, and will have even more to be proud of.

Another fundamental approach to maintaining interest is to renew your commitment to excellence. Set higher standards for yourself. Seek to match the skills of higher role models. In time, many people will be striving to match *your* skills, and that's a good feeling.

Perhaps the most important advice for staying in karate is: Work to keep it fun. Work to find the enjoyment, the satisfaction and the challenges that are there waiting for you. Keep a positive attitude and you will be enjoying your hours in karate each week for many years to come.

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