



How To Be a Better Martial Artist - **Part One**

Hi, I'm **Richard J. Van Donk** director of the *International Bujinkan Dojo Association* and co-founder of *Bushindo Martial Arts University*. Over the last 40+ years I have had the good fortune to train with many great Grandmasters and have received high master level certification from several of them. I have even brought many students to master level myself. Enjoy this brief report on some master keys to becoming a better martial artist.

Martial Arts begin and end in respect –

Respect yourself, respect others and respect the art you train in. If a student does not respect these things how can a teacher trust handing them life-threatening knowledge? If you cannot speak with good purpose then don't speak at all. If people are being negative move away from them and watch your back. Remember that your training is for YOU so do not rip yourself off by wasting vital energy on useless battles, thoughts or even words that don't build you into a perfected human being. Work on gaining your own personal power and do not give it away to trivial matters as lesser people do. Be a better example.



Know why you are training-

Know what the training is giving you and never lose site of it. It is a most valuable asset and other people, not understanding its value, will try to take it from you. And above all else "Know Yourself".

All martial arts are great and have their purpose -

Go to as many different kind of dojos as you can and at first just pay a mat fee to try the system out. Buy or borrow from a friend a few videos of the top master teachers of an art to see if that is the kind of practice that you want to invest your life into. Do not judge the entire art just by the teacher either. Many teachers are very good practitioners but have not learned properly how to share their art. Then, after having experienced different styles, choose **one** system to be your primary martial arts system – train to at least a BlackBelt in that system before mixing in other martial arts. For my primary system I would choose the one that I felt best and most natural doing because you will invest more time and effort into what makes you feel good. Examine your system as to what may not be emphasized in it and then learn techniques from a system that specializes in that aspect specifically (for example, a sword system may not have any instruction on ground fighting in it.) BUT be sure to keep your main system alive as your foundation. So now you've been training several years and you have your black belt. You're hot stuff, right? Do you think you're finished? Congratulations, getting a black belt is a huge achievement as only maybe one in a thousand that start training will ever achieve it BUT remember that black belt is only a very beginning level to a master teacher. It means only that you have demonstrated enough skill and discipline and have the basics down enough to now be ready to be taught. So if you think that a master will teach you all the secrets of the art before achieving a black belt level keep dreaming. In fact a Yondan (4th degree) is just about ready to learn the deepest teachings. Your black belt should be a base and foundation of your art's teachings. The additional dan levels should teach you how to apply that knowledge while increasing what you learn.



Martial Arts are a way to perfect yourself -

A master looks for those students who want to study the way (Do in Japanese, Dao/Tao in China) of his art and not just the techniques of the art. He knows that the journey is the destination. The inner lessons perfect the outer lessons and the outer lessons perfect the inner lessons. Strengthen the body and you strengthen the mind. Strengthen the mind and you strengthen the body. It must get right on the inside before it gets right on the outside and true Budo is a way of living.

Pick a Teacher / Mentor / Role Model –

You need a Teacher / Mentor / Role Model to bring out the best in you. Even the best of the best in every sport or profession have a coach. Choose a teacher that is doing what you want to do. Do whatever you have to do to develop a personal relationship with him or her. Send them things. Keep in contact. It is up to you to do that. A very good teacher is busy with many things and will usually keep in contact with only those students that make the extra effort. Get in front of your teacher as often as possible. My Ninjutsu teacher lives more than 5,400 miles away but I find a way to go train with him at least 2 times a year. I take great notes and go back and train on everything shown until I need the next lesson. My good students are the ones who arrange their lives so that they can come train and hang out with me. My best students are the ones that go deeper into the way of the teachings by scheduling private sessions so they can learn the kuden (oral transmissions), deeply integrate their taijutsu and learn the life changing philosophy of the art. If there is a good dojo near you then take advantage of it. If you are a self-motivator and the art you want to study is not nearby try a distance-learning course and go to seminars or get private one-on-one sessions from a master teacher twice a year to keep your training on course. The truest teachings are transmitted from teacher to student directly, when the student is ready. Build that relationship as deeply as possible and it may last your whole life if you are fortunate.



Get the best education that you can-

Your martial arts training will change your life so you want to get an A in this one. Learn all you can from wherever you can. Start a learning library by getting every piece of information that you can from your teacher and then others on your martial art system. I have collected every book (including all the out of print, impossible to get ones), publication, video tape, DVD or information piece that my instructor has put in print plus another 100+ videos of him that are not on the market. I collect all of his students' material as well. Over the years I have established a university library of information on martial arts and related life enhancing subjects. Now I know that all students are not scholars nor do they want to be. For them I say do some research first and then get only one or two of the very best works on your art and study them until they fall apart. Then choose another book or DVD. Oh ... and for the scholars - don't forget to actually study all the material that you collect!



Study something daily –

Martial arts are a way of life so you must do some practice daily for it to become a part of you. Do a 15-minute routine mini-practice, watch a few video clips, read a related book, visit the forums (like in the Ninja Members Vault or the Ninjutsu Online Study Program), or have a discussion with a martial arts buddy. Be sure to do something everyday to make martial arts your way of life; in other words, don't just learn a few moves on Wednesdays. Visit the dojo or schedule time with a buddy studying a distance-learning course at least 3 times a week for at least a 1.5 hour training session. Do your stretching and warm ups to keep in shape on days when you are not training.

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Get a notebook and write all your lessons down -

Write your lessons down whether the training is in person with a sensei or you are studying a training DVD. While training with Ninjutsu Grandmaster Hatsumi in Japan I took notes at every class and even made notes on the notes when I trained by myself after. These training notes became my instructor's notes when sharing with my students at the dojo. Now these notes have become dan-training manuals for my students so they can learn more for themselves. And soon my very personal insight notes and deeper teachings will be added to a Ninja Gold Members Vault (at www.Ninjutsu.com) for the really dedicated students who want to become teachers themselves. I want to give to my students what my teacher did not have the ability to give to me – a solid roadmap to study.



Training gear –

As my ninja friend Bud says in battle, “If you die we split your gear.” Those who have toys must play with them. Buy or make some training gear, like a 3ft staff, wooden sword, metal katana, 6ft staff, short rope, short sticks and a few training knives. Heh, if you have all that stuff around you are bound to pick it up and play with it. I am assuming that your art has weapons in it because what martial art should be without them? Go figure, I am a Ninja and Eskrima guy so I like toys. Get a good carry bag and you are on your way to travel.

Ranking-

This is between you and your teacher PERIOD. Never take a rank given to you by another teacher other than your own in your art without discussing this first with your teacher (who would most likely have already ranked you if you were really ready). The kind of teacher that ranks other people's students is only after their own gain and is very disrespectful to the art. If you take this new rank then understand that you have chosen to leave your teacher for the new one and that you have made rank more important than the *way* of the teachings. Will that new teacher be there for you when you need help in your training? Do they really know you? Perhaps you were really ‘on’ that day and they saw some of your strengths, but it is not our strengths we need help with, is it? It is our weak points. Rank will come. Knowledge and a mentorship relationship are much more important.



A good teacher will help you empower yourself. Be prepared for personal power surges and talk with your teacher before you split from them. An aspect of this training is that you will free your personal power and you will actually have power surges. At this point many students think they have learned it all and are as good as their instructor. They think he or she has nothing more to teach them and they split. Always remember and respect how far that they have brought you. It is a shame when a student splits right before the student is ready to be taken to the highest levels. It happens to every master

– perhaps the universe is protecting the teachings from those who only want power and technique and not to learn the true Budo way. My friend Shihan Mark Hodel once said something that I really agree with. There are 3 ranks. The one your teacher gives you, the one you grade yourself at and the one that others grade you by. My goal has always been for these to be the same. A rank is just a piece of paper from your teacher that says that you have reached a certain level of study with him or her. Always remember that knowledge and relationships are much more important than rank.

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Training Side Notes:

On Forums –

Stay off the disrespectful-to-each-other forums or where “My teacher is better than your teacher” exists. How is it that students that are not yet even black belts are criticizing 10th dans? This is utterly ridiculous. If these students trained as much as they talked they could one day be a master as well yet I doubt they will master anything. Go only to positive forums that really answer training questions. Your time on this earth is valuable so spend your valuable time wisely.

On Training –

Do it often. Have fun doing it. Always look for one new lesson out of any training. Go just a little beyond what you think that you can do without injury. Drill the move over and over again. Drill and Drill again. Did I say Drill? Yes, do it until the move is automatic and then learn to combine all those drills into a continuous flow. A few hours of sweating while going beyond what you believe your limits are paramount to your martial arts ability. Go to camps, seminars and tai kais so that you can meet new lifetime-long friends and so that you can see people at all levels train. This may be your once in a lifetime opportunity to meet masters. You will be inspired and inspiration is what keeps the training alive. Keep those feelings, drive and passion going.



On Martial Arts DVDs/Videos – *An rvd Quick Track to Mastery Secret*

I own several hundred martial arts videos and this is my study secret. Get a good playback deck (think of it as a university tool) that you can fast forward and rewind at various speeds including slow motion and has NO lines when you do it. I first watch the entire movie in fast-forward and then in reverse fast forward. This burns it in my mind like a real fight would happen. I take a break and then I watch the movie in regular speed forward. If I have the time and it is very important then I will watch it in regular speed reverse. Then I will study the movie practicing part by part myself. Then I will call a training buddy to come over to work on the material with me. I do this so that the learning goes in several modes into my brain and body and it works marvelously. There is also another huge video training secret that I have but you will have to ask me about it in person sometime, as it is a kuden (oral transmission only.) Perhaps come and get a Personal Mastery One-on-One session with me.

How To Be a Better Martial Artist Part 2 is intended to contain

Win at all costs –

Do not get caught up in battles that do not concern you.

Be natural -

Train in nature when you can. Learn the nature of yourself. Learn the nature of others.

Learn Meditation to increase your inner peace, concentration and focus

Learn to flow –

Posture, Center and Breath

Use the Spine

Feeling Art

Distance is your Ally

Power of Posture

Make the ground your friend



Qualities of a Martial Arts BlackBelt- worth \$50,000?

The financial investment to achieve a certified BlackBelt will vary from \$700 for a Distance Learning Course, rank certification & testing fees, plus necessary training gear to at least \$3,750 if you train at a full time Dojo. What the training process gives you is beyond anything you can buy at a store.



Self Assuredness
Enhanced Confidence
Personal Discipline
Commitment to Action
Focused mind
Strength in Body, Mind and Emotions
Mental Concentration
Courage to Overcome inner fears
Perseverance
Leadership Skills
Dedication
Power (Personal)
Health conditioning
Ability to think ahead
Awareness Increased
Self Defense skills
Dependability
Flexibility
Balanced and Centered
Willingness to learn
Self-motivating
Deal with everyday problems from a new perspective

Would you Sell your BlackBelt experience for \$50,000?

We have asked many people over the years that have achieved Black belt level from us "Would you sell your Black belt knowledge, the changes it has made in your life, impact that has made on others around you and the friends you have made for \$50,000? **“NO WAY!”** In one class of 20 Black belts they all said NO to \$1,000,000 - They actually said they would turn down One Million dollars! Now that says something!

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