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Black Belt Essay *by Steve Mindel*

The Black Belt represents determination, follow through and the ability to push yourself far beyond what you thought you were capable of achieving. Over the past five years I learned that the excellent teaching staff at Marina Tae Kwon Do can guide you to your Red Belt, but you are the only one who can get you to your Black Belt. The Black Belt test is about demonstrating that you can execute with precision. Mr. Jones does not "give" you your Black Belt, he "confers" it upon you.

Moving from White Belt to Red Belt is about attending class, paying attention to your instructors and doing a reasonable amount of work outside of class. The basic principles such as set your goals, develop a plan to achieve your goals, have a success coach, and review your goals frequently work well to move you from White Belt to Red Belt, and help you to add organization to both your personal and professional life. I love the fact that each year I have to sit down for a few minutes, and think about what is important to me. One day Debbie Dinges told the Leadership Team, "You have to set your goals because everything that you do in life is either moving toward your goals or away from your goals." In short, if you do not set your goals, you do not know where you are going. One of the most important concepts that I learned as I moved from White Belt to Black Belt is that you have to take consistent action. We all have busy lives, but in order to succeed you have to be consistent. When I was in college I learned that everything that I needed to know to pass the test was taught in class. If I didn't go to class, I was not going to pass the end of the quarter test. It was critical that I made it to my classes each day. For me to move forward in Tae Kwon Do I made sure that my evenings were free every Tuesday and Thursday. Testing regularly forced me to pay attention to my training schedule.

Sometimes it is hard to maintain the motivation to come to class. When I first received my Green Belt I felt like I had stopped improving. I suddenly did not want to attend class. One night particularly stands out for me because I had a very difficult day in court. (Steve is a family law attorney) I did not want to come to class, but I knew that I had push myself. Like my day in court, class was equally tough. At the end of the class I received the Student Of The Day Award, and all of the effort made sense to me.

My first few weeks as a Brown Belt were also very challenging. For the first two months in the Advanced Class, I felt like I was starting all over again. It was humbling to go from being on top of the class as a Blue Belt with a Brown Stripe to being at the bottom of the class as a Brown Belt. My experience in the Intermediate Class gave me the confidence to know that if I just kept going to class, that I would eventually learn the complicated moves such as Jump Flying Side Kick and Spin Hook Kick.

Mr. Jones and the teaching staff have set the path to get you from White Belt to Red Belt. From Red Belt to Black Belt you have to develop your own plan. The nice thing is that you are not alone. I learned that everyone in the club volunteers to be your success coach. Teachers, Leadership Team members and other students supported me in achieving my goal.

One important lesson that I learned is that you have to push yourself to work out every weekend. Each Saturday I did my requirements as if I was testing. Working out even when you are tired is tough, but you have to do it because you never know what will occur the night before the test.

I remember the week before my second black stripe physical fitness test my back went out. I still completed the test without a problem. I worked out each Saturday no matter what occurred on Friday night. One Friday night, two weeks before my June 27 physical fitness test, I had a project at work that I had to complete, and did not get home until 3:00 A.M. The next morning I got up and Nancy, Sam, Jake and I went to the track and I did my test, just as if it was the real thing. When I took the June 27 examination I made sure that I had plenty of sleep and I took the test with confidence because I knew that I could do it on 4 hours sleep.

The most important thing that I learned during my Black Belt training is that being a Black Belt is about executing with precision. In order to be awarded your Black Belt you have to demonstrate that you are an expert. From the first day that I walked onto the mat at Marina Tae Kwon Do I knew that my goal was to become a Black Belt. Everyone wearing a Black Belt in the club has shown that they are an expert, and that they are willing to help you become a Black Belt. In my life I have found that in some groups the leaders are afraid



Steve smiles with excitement as he takes the Black Belt Oath with Mr. Jones

to give away their secrets, and are afraid to let you succeed. I am glad that my family and I picked Marina Tae Kwon Do where there are no secrets, just hard work.

My Black Belt has been a family team effort. Everyone in our family has helped me and sacrificed their personal time for me to become a Black Belt. Even though Nancy, Sam and Jake are also students at Marina Tae Kwon Do they have all given up their time and given me their support so that I could achieve my goal of becoming a Black Belt. I could never have made it this far without their confidence in me and their love.

For everyone who dreams about becoming a Black Belt I have the following advice. Mr. Jones is right, "goals that are not written down are just wishes", so write down that your goal is to become a Black Belt. Position yourself for success by planning ahead. Don't try to reinvent the wheel, just follow the system. Meet with Mr. Jones and the other instructors regularly to set your path to your Black Belt. Attend class regularly, chart your progress, and push yourself to achieve your goal. Becoming a Black Belt is a once in a lifetime experience. Enjoy your journey. •

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