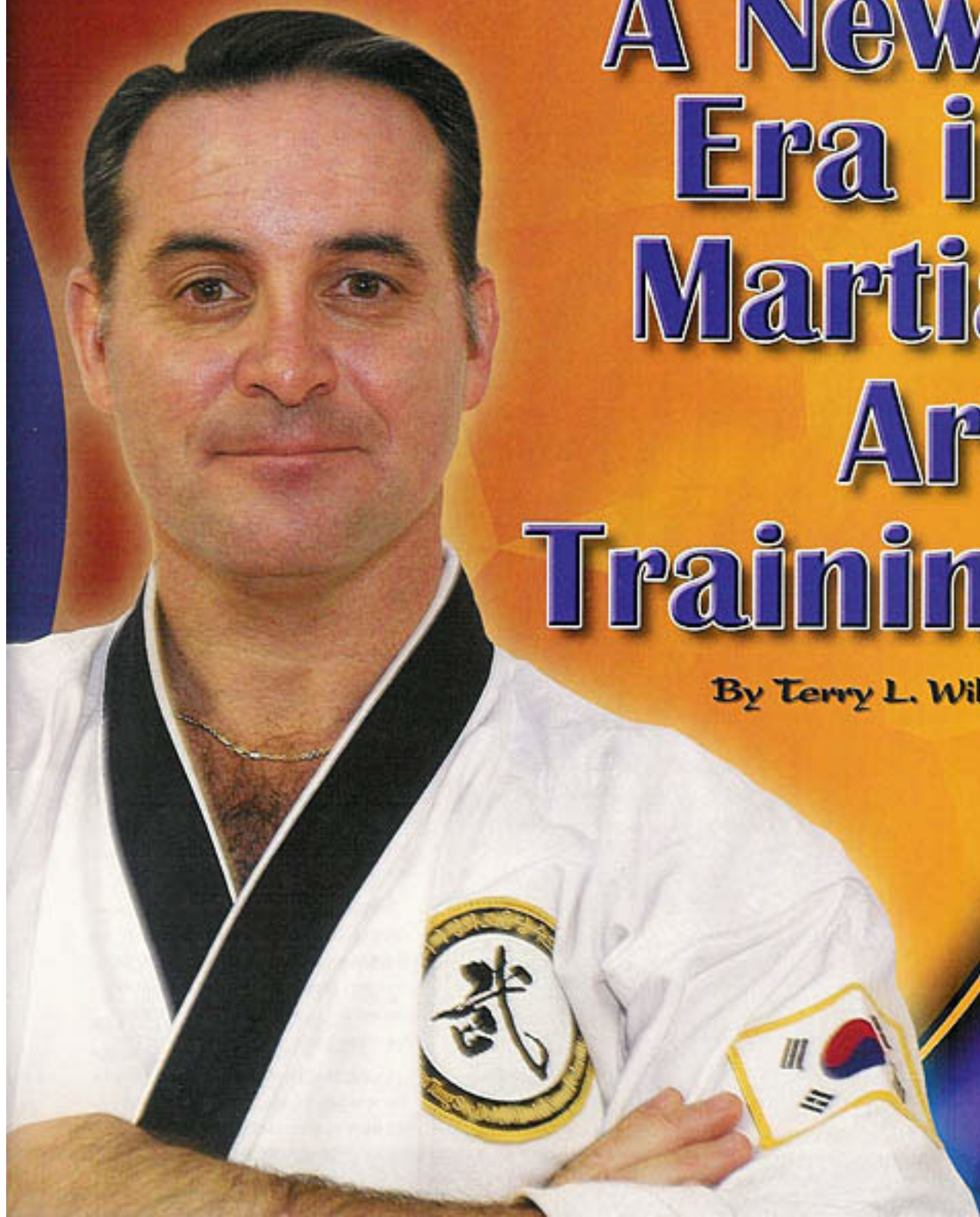


Life Coaching:

A New Era in Martial Arts Training

By Terry L. Wilson



After a decade serving corporate America, John St. James traded in his business suit for a gi. Drawing upon the skills he developed enroute to becoming a high-level executive with State Farm Insurance, St. James created one of the most successful martial arts programs in the country. His premiere programs, Leader Quest and Destiny Quest Leader, have set new standards in the industry. They're helping students to become leaders not only in the dojang, but also in the workplace, home, academic school and community. The goal of the St. James' leadership programs is to make the world a better place one black belt at a time.

Following one's dream is often a quest that gets lost in the reality of surviving in a world that entangles us with obligations such as paying rent, car loans, buying food and finding a way to achieve the American Dream of home ownership. This is especially true once an individual has been embraced by a large corporation that offers a nice payday, benefits and job security. For a person to one day just get up and walk away from such a position to open up a karate school in a country where karate schools are as common as Starbucks, may be considered professional suicide by some.

But in 1996, that's exactly what John St. James of Suwanee, Georgia, a suburb of Atlanta, did. He followed his passion and, in the process, created one of the most successful karate schools in the country. His Leadership Program is the platform from which he has launched a new breed of motivated

students and teachers. Destiny Quest consists of two separate and distinct programs. They are CIT (Certified Instructor Training) and CDP (Career Development Program). The first focuses on how to teach, motivate, inspire and lead a group of students ranging in ages, mental maturity and socioeconomic backgrounds. The latter, CDP, focuses on martial arts as a wonderful career choice.

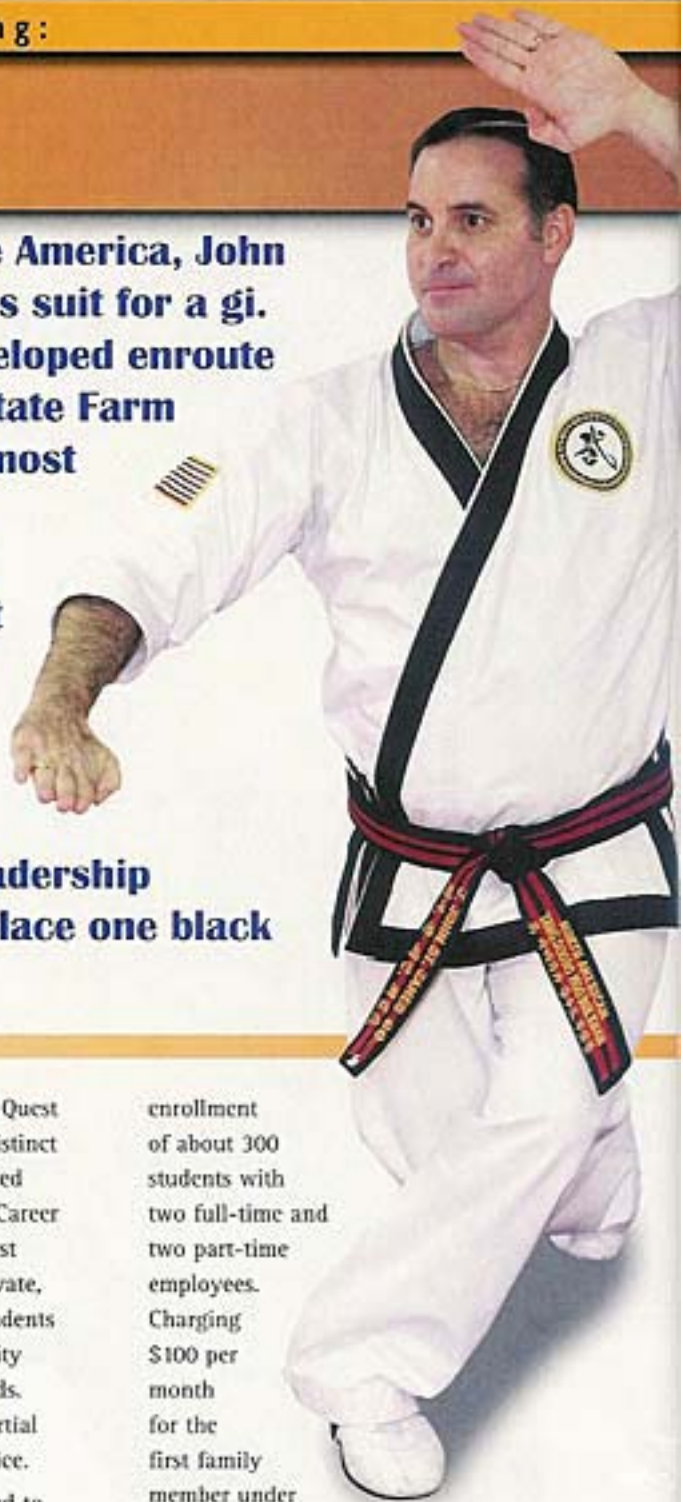
"Destiny Quest was developed to help advanced Leadership students reach a new level of achievement and excellence," St. James explains. "Destiny Quest is our premiere program and lasts for thirty-six to forty-eight months, but can be completed in as little time as twelve months. It's all up to the candidate. To be eligible, the candidate must at least be a member of our Leadership Program."

With a focus on family membership, St. James has generated an active

enrollment of about 300 students with two full-time and two part-time employees. Charging \$100 per month for the first family member under a basic six-month program, the annual tuition varies between \$1,200 to \$2,400 a year.

"We offer a family discount," St. James says. "Our Leadership Program is \$200 a month per person. After the first two family members have joined, immediate family members living in the same household can train for free."

Using Martial Arts Industry Association (MAIA) materials and his own custom-designed Leadership



Program, St. James has beaten the odds and continues to make his mark among the growing number of entrepreneurial martial arts school owners.

Following a Dream

After graduating from the University of California San Diego in 1984 with a degree in Political Science, John St. James began climbing the corporate ladder as an executive with State Farm. The company began grooming St. James for bigger things within the giant corporation. His first stop landed him in Irvine, California as a Corporate Management Trainee, and the next rung of the ladder put St. James and his wife in Bloomington, Illinois at the corporate headquarters as a Corporate Training Analyst. In 1989, St. James was sent to Atlanta to take charge of State Farm's regional office in Georgia.

Although St. James was considered a mover and shaker by the suits in the executive office of State Farm, the corporate golden boy's heart just wasn't into his work. Since before college, St. James had been training and teaching tang soo do. Each time State Farm relocated St. James to a new city, he opened a martial arts school which he ran after clocking out of his day job.

"I had a karate club at UC San Diego and it's still there twenty-three years later," he says. "Then I started a club at UC Irvine while I was working for State Farm, and when I was transferred to Bloomington, I started a karate club there as well. In 1989, I was transferred to Atlanta for State Farm, and I was moving up the corporate ladder. But in my heart, I knew what I really wanted to do. I really wanted to teach karate."

In 1999, St. James decided to follow his dream, which was to run and operate a martial arts school full time. After building up more than a decade's worth of equity with State Farm,

Fast Facts About John St. James

Name and location of your school? Karate World, Inc. in Suwanee, Georgia, a suburb of metro Atlanta.

Number of years in business? I've been teaching professionally for over 20 years. We've been in our current location for the past 9 years.

Number of schools you operate? 1.

Size of your school in square footage? Approximately 2,500.

Number of employees? Two full time and two part time.

Number of active students? About 300.

Are your children and adult classes separate or mixed? For the most part, our children and adult classes are separate. Yet we do offer family classes where parents can train with their children.

Are you a MAIA member? Yes.

Name of your billing company? AAC (Affiliated Acceptance Corporation), plus some in-house billing.

How much do you charge for the first family member per month? Our basic program (6 months) is \$100 per month for the first family member.

Do you offer a family discount and, if so, how much? Yes, for our Leadership Program, which is \$200 per month per person. After the first two family members have joined, immediate family members living in the household can train for free.

Amount of yearly tuition? Depending on the program, it varies between \$1,200 per year and \$2,400 per year.

Monthly gross? We average over 50K per month.

Monthly pro shop gross? It varies between \$2,500 and \$3,500 per month.

Do you charge testing fees and, if so, how much? Yes, our fee for color-belt testing is currently \$35 for group tests and \$65 for semi-private testing. We do one semi-private testing per 8-week cycle for mainly professionals who can't make a group test.

Do you have an after-school pick-up program? No.

St. James traded in his corner office for a 2,500-square-foot karate school.

"There just came a point in time when I realized I had to follow my passion, which was the martial arts," says St. James. "I had ten years with State Farm, and next year I'll have ten years running a professional martial arts academy. I couldn't have done it without the help of my partner, Mrs. Deborah K. Jett, and, of course, my wife. When I left State Farm, I was pulling down a very nice salary, so I was taking quite a chance by leaving all that security to open a karate school."

As one of the most successful karate school operators in the country, St. James has soared way beyond his corporate salary and in the process, with each passing day he takes another step toward accomplishing a life-long dream by improving the life of others through the martial arts.

Building Community Leaders One Black Belt at a Time

St. James looked beyond the kicks, punches and self-defense drills that are part and parcel with martial arts training. In addition to all of the basic karate skills, his Leadership Programs give his students the ability to tackle real-life problems outside of the dojang.

"It's important to note that while Leadership Training provides a very thorough overview of state-of-the-art leadership concepts and skills, Destiny Quest deals specifically with real-world training," St. James explains. "That is, the candidate learns at an accelerated pace because he or she is drilled on the material in a semi-private setting under my personal supervision. After each candidate is familiar with the skills

and drills necessary for leading others, he or she is put in front of a class of their peers [Certified Instructor Training candidates] and given the chance to lead. Destiny Quest/CIT includes private one-on-one mentoring so that there is

abilities that are often associated with leaders in life. These abilities include such things as being able to motivate oneself and delay gratification or to regulate one's moods and to keep stress from swamping one's ability to

When I left State Farm, I was pulling down a very nice salary, so I was taking quite a chance by leaving all that security to open a karate school.

a shorter time between the action [in this case, coaching and instructing] and feedback from the master trainer."

St. James says that his Leadership Programs deal specifically with Emotional Intelligence (EI) rather than just academic intelligence or IQ. Many of today's leading peak-performance writers and coaches have contrasted academic intelligence or IQ with EI, or what is also called "Leadership Intelligence." While IQ is often measured by verbal and math skills only, EI focuses and measures

think. EI focuses on one's ability to have empathy and hope for a brighter tomorrow by being able to decide in advance to be happy. EI focuses on being able to articulate a message with passion, purpose and vision.

"To sum it all up, although academic intelligence will certainly help a person to learn more effectively and efficiently, those who do best in life also have the ability to cope on a mature level," St. James says. "Those who communicate effectively and



with passion, are goal-oriented, can think out of the box and take action despite the challenges put in front of them are the leaders of the future."

Working for the Greater Good

Taking a page from some of the world's best peak-performance coaches, St. James drew upon his "Everyone Wins" philosophy when creating the foundation for his unique program.

"When I was laying the groundwork for what I wanted to get out of my Leadership Program," St. James explains, "I called upon the four classes of experience, one of which is, it feels good, it's good for me, it's good for others and it serves the greater good. That's a Class-One experience and everyone enjoys that. For me, teaching is a Class-One experience because I love teaching. It feels good for me and I know it's good for the people I'm teaching and I know it serves a greater good. However, it only serves a greater good if I am preparing them [his students] to show their potential at a higher level at home, school, work and community."

To accomplish his lofty goal of training future leaders, St. James began shifting the focus of his school toward peak-performance training. He personally enrolled in courses focusing on peak-performance coaching, along with additional Neural Linguistic Programming (NLP) courses to improve his own communication skills. Once St. James was satisfied that he could empower others, he implemented the Leadership Program into his martial arts curriculum.

"Our basic program is laid out for six months, but we find that most of our students are upgrading within the first couple of weeks into our Black Belt Training Program," says St. James.

"In our school, that's either Black Belt Club or Masters Club or they go into Leadership, which is our Premiere Program. We've just recently added a higher program, which is our Destiny Club. What we're doing through this program is finding the people who have the desire to become teachers."

St. James is himself a professional motivational speaker who talks-the-talk and definitely walks-the-walk when it comes to his commitment to making everyone around him become the best that they can be at whatever it is they want to do.

"What I enjoy most is helping others to step out of their comfort zones, face their fears and overcome them," he explains. "This is a New Age of martial arts and, in today's world, learning how to defend yourself takes on a different application than it did three decades ago. Today's martial art students are more likely to use what they learn in the dojang to defend against the challenges of problems at home, the work place and school than they are a mugger in the street. The kind of defense we're trying to empower our students with is the ability to defend themselves against the challenges they face in the everyday world in which they live."

In addition to this New Age, or 21st-century approach to martial arts, St. James is first and foremost a master in traditional tang soo do. As the head and founding master of the Atlantic-Pacific Tang Soo Do Federation, he helps member studio owners in his federation the same way he helps his students, only at a higher level. In both cases, he sees his mission to help empower his students by helping them develop an extraordinary mindset. This he does by using tang soo do as his vehicle. He's also an expert in Korean, Chinese and Okinawan weaponry, with an emphasis

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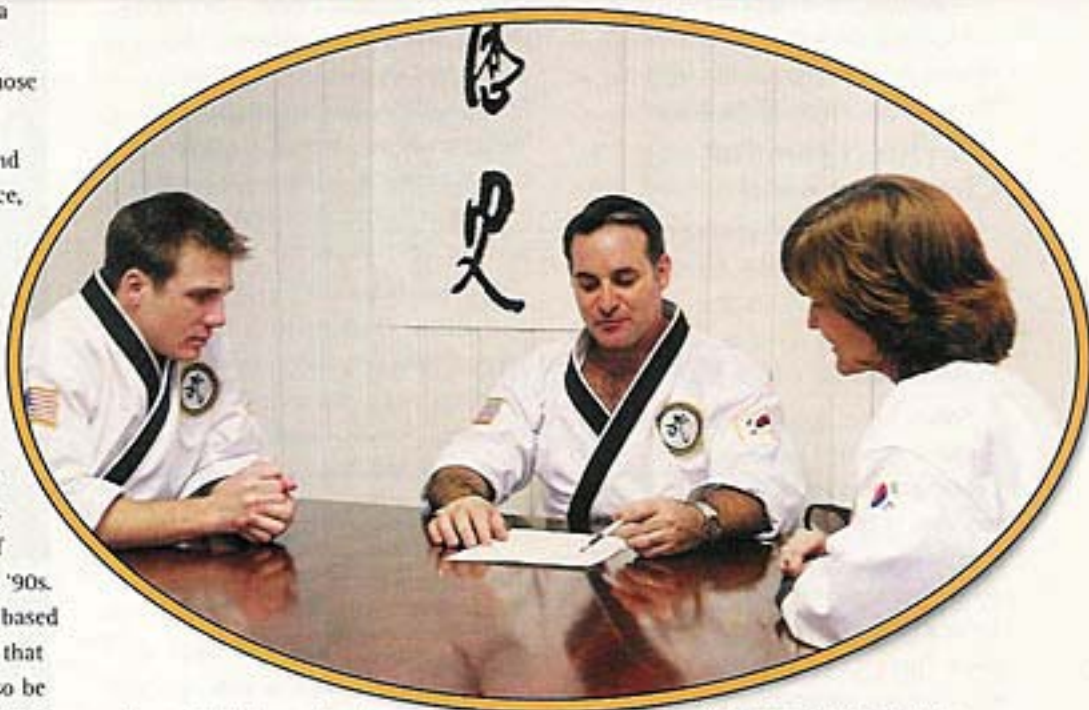
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on the bo or staff. He also wields a mean sword, cane and nunchucks and takes great pride in passing those ancient skills on to his students.

"I believe strongly in empty-hand forms," says St. James. "To advance, you must have a great command of the fundamental basics, which can be learned by constantly practicing traditional hyung or kata. We don't want to lose our Budo or the martial way because that's the core of the martial arts. But on the other side of that coin, our clientele today is completely different from those of the 1960s, '70s, '80s and even the '90s. We are looking at different needs based on society as it is today. I believe that the focus in the dojang should also be on developing higher-end social skills, and students should use what they learn in the studio to help others."

Just as St. James has made a lifelong commitment to his students, he expects a commitment from them in return. The contract for a student is 36 months — three years — whether you're doing a Black Belt Club (BBC) or Masters Club (MC) or the Leadership Program. The Career Development Program



along with his son, Josh. Somewhere in the process of learning a sidekick from a roundhouse, Ron Pratt discovered the true benefit of St. James's Leadership Program.

"In addition to getting into great shape, I began learning other valuable life skills," he says. "I've learned ways to defend myself; not the way you see in the movies, but in the real world kind, that might save me or

Program that I began to see the biggest changes in my life. In leadership, I have a personal success coach and mentor in Master St. James, who's helping me be more successful not only in the martial arts but in all aspects of my life. I've also learned that I can increase my productivity by turning up the intensity with which I do things. That has helped me become more efficient and productive at work, at home and at the academy.

"But," Pratt adds, "I'll tell you what has been the single biggest change for me personally. I'm fifty-one-years old, and for the first time in my entire life, I have some *written goals*. It's still a work in progress as I continue to learn more about goal-setting. But it's a great feeling to wake up in the morning knowing you've got a road map to follow instead of wandering around aimlessly. I only wish I had learned and taken to heart some of these concepts earlier. How much more could I have accomplished with my life so far?"

"As a parent, I can think of nothing, other than church, that I would rather

Those who communicate effectively and with passion, are goal-oriented, can think out of the box and take action despite the challenges put in front of them are the leaders of the future.

(CDP) is also a 36-month program, during which time a student may also learn to conduct the school business.

Impacting Lives

At age 51, Ron Pratt is one of the oldest students at the St. James's school. Pratt started taking lessons

my family from a bad situation. Not just in a physical sense, but I've also gained the communications skills and self-confidence needed to talk my way out of a bad situation if it should arise.

"However, as great as that is, it was after I joined the Leadership

have my child involved with," Pratt insists. "My son and I now have something we can do together. And as we go through those tough teenage years, I know that the lessons we're learning in our martial arts training, both physical and mental, will help us both cope much better, and come through them closer than ever."

Family Training Works

St. James believes one of the steps to success for any school owner is to first define the purpose of your school. That is, what your outcome will be? Are

When asked which of the those types of schools would turn the greater profit, St. James was quick to say that family-oriented schools like his are the wave of the future.

"Without a doubt, a family-oriented martial arts center will bring in not only a larger number of students, but also families tend to stay longer," St. James explains. "Our purpose is to sanction and certify quality martial arts through developing professional instructors and studio owners. Our mission is to promote traditional

The Budo Side of the Leadership Program

"We do goal-setting with our Leadership students," explains John St. James. "They need to write down their goals and be specific, measurable, obtainable and relevant – and have a timeline." In his five-year CIT (Certified Instructor Training) Program, St. James works closely with those individuals on one-to-one basics, getting very specific focusing on what it is that they want to do with their lives.

"Our Leadership Program on the Budo side is the martial way because the martial arts is the vehicle by which we get there," he says. "I like to use the movie, *The Last Samurai*, as an example because the samurai were more than warriors; they were experts in the art of living. Samurai were single-minded in their pursuit of excellence in everything they did. Whether it was a tea ceremony or sharpening their swords or calligraphy, they were very mindful and focused on whatever task was at hand.

"The way we analogize goal-setting for our students is, we explain to them that in order to get the most out of their lives, they must have clarity and be focused on what it is they want. Decide in advance what you want, then write it down. For school owners, that's statistics. If you can't measure it, how do you know where you are or where you're going?"

"I believe anything is obtainable to the willing mind," St James concludes. "And we're all about getting people out of their comfort zones and getting them to challenge themselves, which takes me back to my samurai analogy. The reason the samurai were such great warriors is because they were detached from death itself. They challenged themselves to the next level and that's what we want our people to accomplish."

you going to be a family martial arts center, or will you focus on winning tournaments and be a competitive school, or are you going to be an old style, "hard-knock" kind of school?

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Success Doesn't Have an Age Limit

At age 42, Mark Hensley decided to take karate, something he'd wanted to do since he was a kid. Mark had no idea of just how much his life would change from the moment he bowed on the floor of St. James' dojang in Suwanee, Georgia.

"I have learned to step out of my comfort zone early in my training," Hensley says. "Physically, I feel better about myself and the way I look. The training on the floor has helped me get back into shape. I have regained my self-confidence and, with each passing day, my skills continue to improve and I continue to grow as a person.

"Along with the physical workouts, the Black Belt Leadership classes have helped me greatly. With a master with thirty years experience [St. James] who takes being a leader very seriously, I'm encouraged and excited to know that we are creating leaders and mentors from this class. The mental studies we cover in class have helped me to see and understand situations

with more clarity. The role-playing and being able to practice during class has knocked down the last of the barriers I had about talking in front of a group. I also know this is helping others that were terrified to speak to a crowd.

"I feel the most impressive part of the journey is the goal-setting," Hensley says. "This is the part that has helped me enormously. Other schools may be very good at teaching the physical part of the art, but when I have that as well as defined goals about what I want and how to get it, I have achieved more and my life will show it. I found that after setting my goals to paper, things just started happening for me.

"This journey I am on with Master St. James has been a growing and eye-opening experience; it's a road everyone should travel. On this journey, I have become a forward thinker that starts each day with a purpose instead of letting the unknown be my guide."

the knowledge that *attitude* is more important than *aptitude* and action is more important than education alone. That is, great school owners are developed through professional training [education] and yet proven over time through their action."

St. James says that it isn't necessarily the number of students that will eventually determine the success of a school; it's the quality of committed students that equals longevity and big numbers.

"We know that families will train longer and more consistently together," he says. "So the retention rate is much better, and there's a special energy that comes from families

training together. When mom, dad and the kids train together, it's a great atmosphere. And from a business standpoint, the financial side of it is

he first opened his dojang. The lessons he learned along the way have paved the path to the success he now enjoys.

"When I first started my school, I didn't have contracts," he says. "I thought the key to success was to get as many students in the door as possible. But I didn't have the confidence to ask for a contract and I took everyone at their word because I knew they could trust me. Well, that didn't work. I also tried a lot of programs like Cardio Kickboxing and just more stuff in general and that didn't work either.

About that time, I realized I needed contracts and to focus on statistics and look at my business more as a statistical analysis of where am I now and where I want to be a year from now."



without a doubt the best route to take."

Like many school owners, St. James went through some growing pains when

St. James began a quest for knowledge, driving and flying to meet with top school owners, taking seminars, anything to improve his knowledge. It was then that all the

end of business training. It became clear from reading MAIA material and *Martial Arts Success* magazine that the 21st century is definitely going to be about life coaching and

Our basic program is laid out for six months, but we find that most of our students are upgrading within the first couple of weeks into our Black Belt Training Program. In our school, that's either Black Belt Club or Masters Club or they go into Leadership, which is our Premiere Program.

pieces to what would become his formula for success fell into place.

"I learned that success was a lot more than contracts and studying statistics, it was life skills and life coaching," St. James says. "It's then that I embarked upon some high-end personal training for myself, and at that time the Martial Arts Industry Association (MAIA) came along and opened up the door to a higher

peak-performance training – and the schools that understand that are the schools that are going to flourish."

Terry L. Wilson has been in the martial arts since the early 1960s and is a full-time freelance writer and television producer. One of his five Emmy Awards was for the only TV special on the martial arts ever to receive the television industry's highest honor.



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