

The Eighth Dan:

by

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This is quite an amusing little story so I thought I might share it with you.

Quite a few years ago, I was asked by a friend of an acquaintance about my karate. I usually get a bit reluctant to say anything much because to me it is something personal that I do to improve myself. It's not really anybody else's business. However, anybody and everybody who knows me – and even quite a few who don't – know that I have been training for many years. To be precise, 54 years now without any break

People do ask me questions from time to time so I feel obliged to answer, depending on who is asking, their level of need to know and based also on how I perceive that they might react.

Here is how this conversation went with a fellow whose name is Steve (Not our Steve Andrezza, BTW). This is as best I can remember it:

Steve: *"So, Gary, they tell me you're a bit of a karate expert."*

Me: *"Do they?"*

Steve: *"Yes. So what rank are you?"*

THOUGHT: Nothing like being straight to the point, huh?

At this point, the conversation of about half a dozen other people stopped and they all looked at me expectantly. It's funny how so many people have what I call "multi-directional hearing!"

Me: *"Steve, seriously, even if I told you, you wouldn't believe it."*

Steve: *"Try me."*

THOUGHT: Here we go... [glancing around the table I could see everyone was waiting...]

Me: *"What if I said I have a black belt?"*

Steve: *"Well, yeah, I know that but what actual Dan grade are you?"*

EXPLANATION FOR BETTER UNDERSTANDING:

The ranking system in my style of karate (like many others) goes from 10th Kyu (novice) white belt through to 1st Kyu brown belt which is the level right below the black belt. Then there is a provisional grade called Shodan-Ho which is a provisional black belt to see if you have what it takes both in physical and mental attributes to make the transition up onto the Dan ladder.

From there it goes from 1st Dan black belt to 10th Dan black belt, which is the highest achievement that any person in karate can attain. By the way, the senior black belts are often not even black in colour. They can be black and red or red and white or just plain red at the highest levels (refer to the photo to the right). These are usually reserved for 'titled' exponents – meaning those who have been awarded teaching titles. But that is a whole other subject.



Continuing on...

Me: *"Steve, if I told you, you probably wouldn't believe me anyway."*

Steve: *"Well, tell me anyway!"*

Me: *"OK. What if I said I am a first Dan, would you believe that?"*

Steve: *"Nup!"*

Me: *"OK, what if I told you I am an 8th Dan. Would you believe that?"*

OBSERVATION: At this point my replies were beginning to sound like the old "Get Smart" TV comedy skit from the late 1960's – "would you believe..."

Steve: *"No way!"*

Me: *"See? It is just like I said. You don't believe me."*

Steve: *"So, what rank are you?"*

Me: *"I have already given you a truthful answer. One of those two is correct. Believe what you want to believe and that will be the truth for you."*

CONCLUSION: When you are asked questions like this, it is often better to answer with

some Confucianism. The lack of understanding for so many people about karate is incredible. Everybody thinks they know more than they do, probably from watching the highly unrealistic movies on TV. That is where they get most or all of their knowledge about anything from. Therefore, to avoid confrontation – especially in the areas of politics or religion it is best to be a bit fuzzy with it all.

Not long after that discussion I was awarded a 9th Dan (Kudan) anyway but what I said at the time was correct – in a roundabout way.

NEVER flaunt your achievements. It mostly just breeds contempt or jealousy resulting, often, in ridicule. Nobody really gives a damn anyway. That is just the way western society has evolved, sadly.



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