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Editorial

THE "GRANDMASTER" DILEMMA

Matthew Flacche, Editorial Staff

When I look in martial arts literature, I notice everyone is a "Grandmaster"?! What is a Grandmaster in martial arts? It is my understanding if a person develops a system of martial arts which proves itself *unique* in one or more ways, then this individual could name the system. If the system attracts followers, eventually the developer/founder would be hailed as the "Grandmaster" of that fighting art.

How does a stylist *earn* this god like label? Simple... they call themselves "Grandmaster". There is no training program, nor set of criteria to fulfill. In addition to self-proclamation, there exists organizations which invite and/or seek sponsorship of individuals who wish to display the coveted title. This gives the impression there is a "Supreme Master" of the Grandmasters who possesses the power to grant Grandmaster promotions. Obviously this is not the case.

There should be fewer Grandmasters in the martial arts if they are to be considered legitimate titles. One *leader* of Tae Kwon Do, Tang Soo Do, Shotokan Karate, Kung Fu, Jui Jitsu, etc., is enough!

For example, if someone learns Tae Kwon Do from a master instructor or a Tae Kwon Do school, it would seem bogus to change some moves, maybe add some grappling, wear black uniforms instead of white uniforms, and start a *new system* called "Joe Karate's Black Panther Tae Kwon Do", where Joe Karate is the "Grandmaster". This is not to say that Joe couldn't study Tae Kwon Do until he reaches the master level (a rank one could earn) and open his own school, but he is not a Grandmaster by any means. Furthermore, Joe is failing to acknowledge/credit his teacher(s), an extremely disrespectful demonstration.

One of the most noted, innovative martial artists of all time was Bruce Lee. He invented a system of fighting which included a "no waste" philosophy. This meant if movements or techniques were deemed ineffective by the practitioner, they were discarded. However if newly acquired information proved useful, practical, and efficient, the information was added to the bank of fighting knowledge. Even today, almost thirty years later, people practice martial arts while incorporating that same philosophy. Considering all of his many contributions to the advancement and improvement of martial arts, did he call himself a Grandmaster? Absolutely not! If a person practices a martial art, and decides to punch a different way, or defend with a different strategy, then the person is practicing Bruce Lee's philosophy, but he/she is not a Grandmaster.

There is a need in the martial arts to reserve the title "Grandmaster" for more appropriate situations. As a consumer/participant in the martial arts, it is your responsibility to be cautious, even skeptical when deciding who to train with. Chances are if you encounter a school owner that claims to be a "Grandmaster", the title was self-proclaimed or loosely appointed. Would you want your *master* (primary) instructor to be a humble, honest, person who respects the source of his/her great knowledge, OR would you enjoy training with someone so full of them self they want people to think of them as the ultimate being, impossible to dispute, be all end all of martial arts? The choice is yours.

