

# Training To Black Belt

**Master Oliver:** ...process of developing to and training to black belt. It's been a very, very exciting month and quarter for us. We produced an awful lot of new black belts, including our most recent prep cycle Fall of 2000 team, with an awful lot of new black belts ranging in age from as young as 6 all the way up into the 40's, 50's and even 60's.

But what we want to do is we want to have some information to help all of our students understand the process of developing to black belt. What's involved with that, how the processes unfold, and how the structure of our curriculum and also the structure of the requirements for a commitment and so forth work in order to accomplish that.

So we're going to make every effort to answer every conceivable question and then some today, and also to make sure that the process is thoroughly explained.

Maybe I can start from the beginning. The reason we're doing these teleconference series is anyone who's been at our recent extravaganza or intramurals knows, we have had just an explosion of new students this last few months and it starts to get overwhelming for our staff to be able to communicate effectively on a one-on-one basis with everyone and fully explain it in a very clear way.

So what we're going to work on doing and I'm going to try to accomplish as much as possible and then share questions and answers with our staff and with students tuning in, is just every way that the program unfolds, how the process works, and give a real clear understanding of how things go with the program.

First off, some foundational basics. Probably anyone listening to this call already understands it, but just the foundational basics, is typically it takes 36 to 48 months to get to black belt from starting in our martial arts program; another 30 months, on average to go from first degree to second degree black belt.

What we do with all students is everybody starts with a trial in the school, and it's a short opportunity to get started in the program with no long-term commitment or obligation, predominantly so that 2 things can happen simultaneously: number one, so that for a child, the parents can evaluate our school, our program, the overall philosophy of what we're trying to accomplish, look at how the program unfolds. And, of course, we've created an awful lot of tools and resources in order to understand that, including the marvelous DVD we shot at our Breckenridge black belt test.

But what we want to do is have the parents really do some due diligence on our school, make sure that they feel comfortable, that over a long-term process that if their child starting at 7, when they got to be 10 or 11 – or starting when they're get, when they got to be 13 or 14 – if getting to black belt would be in sync with their family values, their long-term outcomes that they're interested in. And really, do they have both an interest and an aptitude for it?

The second thing that we want to be doing in that trial basis is, frankly, our instructors are evaluating each family and looking for interest, aptitude, capability, and also really looking to

figure out whether we're comfortable making a commitment on our end for a commitment to black belt.

So we're always looking to make sure that we feel comfortable with a long-term commitment to having somebody become a part of our family long-term. Clearly, we've generated hundreds of black belts. And those individuals, once they get to black belt, really do become part of the family on a long-term basis. So we want to evaluate and make sure that we feel 100% committed to get the child and family to black belt.

And number 2, that we're really, really convinced that it's something that we're willing to put the time and effort and sweat equity into making sure, whether it's for a child or an adult, that we're going to be really good at the follow-through and really good at making sure that person gets to black belt.

So we start with the trial enrollment so that we have the opportunity for the family to evaluate, do some due diligence on Mile High Karate, the program and the structure of the curriculum; 2) so we have an opportunity to really get to know someone much better than we're going to have an opportunity to in just one or 2 lessons.

The evaluation process, fastest-paced, goes over the first couple of weeks and, more typically, over the first month or 2, to make sure that we feel really comfortable with that level of follow-through and that level of commitment. Because it's a huge commitment on the part of our instructors and a huge commitment on the part of Mile High Karate, obviously, to work with somebody for 3 or 4 years, bring them into our black belt family, and then really commit to work with them in martial arts for life, at that point.

So that's the initial stage. And, again, this is just the foundational information. But we start with that trial basis, so that both sides have a chance to evaluate and really build some relationship, build some rapport, and decide whether we're comfortable with that or not.

Then, at the early stages, we are having the instructors evaluate both in a family situation, both the child and the parents looking to make sure we feel comfortable with that commitment, and then recommending a choice of processes to get to black belt. And, again, at that point, we have found that there really is one of 2 decisions that a family can make at that point.

Decision one is they're going to train for a year and they're going to go on to some other activity, and martial arts was going to have been a wonderful experience but not a lifestyle, not a long-term life-changing event.

Number 2 is they're going to make a definite decision to commit to train to and follow-through to black belt. If a family makes that decision, our success rate has been almost 100%. Pretty much who, at white belt or gold belt, decides to the family that they definitely, unequivocally, without a doubt are going to be a black belt, will be a black belt.

What we have also found is that unfortunately, parents and kids hate to make a commitment and hate to have their feet held to the flame with a long-term goal. And what a lot of people do is they try to cop out and say, "I'm going to keep training for a while. I'm going to follow through with taking class. I like class. We're enjoying it. But we're going to wait and see, and see what happens."

We decided, long ago, to force a commitment and force the decision to either “Yes, I’m going to be a black belt” or “no, I’m not.”

Looking at thousands of students over the years, what we have found is anyone who says, “Maybe I will and I’m going to wait and see,” never gets their black belt, which means they fail by default, as opposed to making a conscious decision to train for a year and go onto something else or make a conscious decision to be successful with it.

So as a foundational understanding, what we always want to do is we want to start with an initial trial, look at evaluating in the first few months. Sometimes, the first few weeks somebody’s doing really well. And worst case, look at the evaluation over the first month or 2 as a white belt. And then everyone decides whether it’s a reasonable goal, a reasonable commitment to follow-through and to be a black belt.

Now certainly, we have about 75% of the students that we look at that we’re, in all likelihood, going to be willing to make a commitment for and to work with. We have about 25% that we just decided it’s not appropriate.

So we don’t end up with everybody who starts in the school on a trail basis training either in our master club or in our leadership to train to black belt, but we do end up with a pretty good percentage. And the ones who do make that commitment and for whom we make the commitment, inevitably will be a black belt.

So it’s a long-term strategy to work together to be very successful.

Now, the next thing about that, and some of the questions that parents ask us at times, is they ask if they start training in the process to black belt, what’s the probability of their 7-, 8-, 9-, 10-, 11- or 12-year-old actually following through and being a black belt. And sometimes the concern is, one, can my 9-year-old really be a black belt. Concern number 2 is can I really be committed to and can I really be confident that they’re going to continue to be interested and be focused on training.

So question one is can that child, at their level of aptitude and their level of capability, can they really be a black belt? And number 2 is what if the child loses interest at some point?

And both of those questions are pretty easy to follow and understand. We’ve had black belts as young as 6. We’ve had black belts as old as 76.

We have a process where the developmental process of black belt isn’t dependent upon what somebody’s age is. In fact, what we find is the younger a child starts, the better their end outcome is going to be.

Now, what will happen in the first 6 to 9 months, they’re not going to look like they’re learning as fast as some of the older kids. But if the child starts when they’re 4 or 5, they’re learning more stuff more quickly at that age and it takes 12 to 18 months to really come together, and then all of a sudden, their end outcome when they’re a black belt at 6, 7 or 8 years old is just phenomenal.

But the other question, I think, is more illuminating, which is, “How can I know that my young child is always going to be interested in this? How can I be sure they’re not going to lose interest? How can I be sure they’re going to follow through?”

The presumption in that question is, often times, the parent’s perspective about the program. Because we start with this isn’t like a seasonal sports activity. It’s not recreational. It’s not like swimming. It’s not like soccer. This is a school. And if the child and the parents treat this as a school with a curriculum, with testing processes, with long-term outcome, then it’s no more difficult for a child to go from second grade in school to fifth grade in school as it would be to go from beginner to first-degree black belt. And it’s no more difficult to go from first-degree black belt to second-degree black belt than it would be to go from fourth to sixth grades.

What it requires is a commitment on our instructor’s part and a commitment on the parents’ part, that this is going to be treated like any other school and there’s going to be regular follow-through and regular participation, and the program is going to unfold on a consistent basis.

Over the years, with the hundreds of black belts that we’ve had that have been under 12, what we have found is that every one of them had some day when they said to their mom or dad they’d rather be out playing softball in the spring or they’d rather be playing Xbox or Nintendo, rather than go to karate class.

And as long as there was a regular and consistent twice-a-week attendance pattern and as long as the parents said, “Well, put that away, we’re going to go to karate now, it’s your karate day,” then those kids are just as likely to get to black belt and have no gaps in their attendance or participation.

We’re going to get a little bit more interactive with several of our instructors here. I know we have Master Lewis on the line. We have Mr. Young on the line, Mr. Bowser.

What other instructors do we have on the line with us?

**Attendee:** Mrs. Bowser.

**Master Oliver:** Okay, we have Daphne Bowser.

**Attendee:** You do have Master Lewis.

**Master Oliver:** Master Lewis? Excellent.

**Attendee:** You have Frank Brown.

**Master Oliver:** We have Frank Brown. Several of them have put themselves on mute here, while I was pontificating.

Let’s walk through, and I know we have some others who haven’t spoken up yet, but Master Brown, how old were you when you started in martial arts?

**Attendee:** I was 7, sir.

**Master Oliver:** You were 7 years old. Master Lewis, how old was Laquita when she started?

**Attendee:** Laquita was 3½ when she started, sir.

**Master Oliver:** How about Brandon?

**Attendee:** Brandon was 3½ as well.

**Master Oliver:** Okay. How about Natasha?

**Attendee:** Natasha was 6.

**Master Oliver:** Okay. So you've had the experience of two 3½-year-olds and a six-year-old all getting to their black belt.

**Attendee:** Yes, sir.

**Master Oliver:** And before any of the parents think that there's an argument to be made that, of course, you're running a martial arts school, Brandon has developed through the process, to some extent, while you've been running the Lakewood school as a head instructor.

But actually, Natasha and Laquita started before you did, correct?

**Attendee:** Yes, sir. They were red belts when I was a white belt.

**Master Oliver:** So, there you go. Don't you wish you had started with them?

**Attendee:** I really do. I really do.

**Master Oliver:** Talk to us. Let's talk about Laquita and/or Brandon and the process of starting that 3½-year-old, and then following through to black belt.

**Attendee:** Okay. When Laquita first started, she was real shy. She didn't want to get involved on the floor and have to leave the school, because she would cry. She wanted to be with daddy. She was a daddy's girl.

As she grew up, she didn't catch on as fast as Natasha. Natasha would catch on with the kicks, she would catch on with everything else.

Laquita was just a Little Ninja. At that time, we called them Little Dragons. She was a Little Dragon, and she would just go at her own little pace.

But as Laquita developed, she passed Natasha, believe it or not. She caught her and passed her, because testing for black belt Laquita was really, really serious in the martial arts when she was about 6 years old. She received her black belt when she was 6½.

So that transition from 3½ to 6½ was unbelievable. There's nothing else in this world I could have gotten them involved in to see such a change in my kids, at that time. At that time, I was a single parent trying to raise 2 girls. Putting them in martial arts school was definitely a choice well-made.

When Brandon was coming up through the ranks, we were already black belts. He was a stud. He was different. He was just one of those boys that wanted to do everything. That was the difference between Laquita and Brandon. He was a boy and I was used to raising girls. And when he would get up there and do things, he would catch on like it was nothing. So he was a

natural. But that was because he grew up. He was a baby when we were first-degrees, and he was part of it.

**Master Oliver:** In his case, he grew up in it. But I think Laquita and Natasha are an interesting case example for most of the parents that are going to be listening in and trying to evaluate for their own child.

In the process through with both girls, did you find days that they didn't want to go to karate or they fought you along the way? And how did you find their interest building or waning as they went through the process?

**Attendee:** Yes, sir. As a matter of fact, I was talking to a parent tonight and they were looking at Miss Lewis, she's a fourth-degree now, and they were saying, "Does she ever want to quit?" And I go, "Well, yes, she did." And this parent's going, "Will my kid ever want to quit?" I go, "Absolutely. They will want to quit. There will be times they just want to give up. But then you, as the coach, you need to weight it. You need to be the coach. There are going to be times when they're going to want to quit elementary school. There are going to be times, mom, that you did not want to go to work. But do you give up? No, you don't give up, you go on.

When Laquita was about a blue belt, she was like, "Daddy, I really don't want to go anymore." But I coached her through it.

You might say, "Well, I don't want to make my kid do anything." You're not making them. Parents, we know what is best for our kid, and I made the decision that this was best for Laquita.

So we would say, "Okay, you go once a week." And eventually, her interest got back. So from blue to high blue to red, she was up and down, up and down. By the time she hit red, she was back on the bandwagon. I go, "Thank God I did not let her quit."

What if I had let her quit? She would not be where she is today, right now. She would not be a fourth-degree black belt. She would not have had the opportunity, in high school, to know more than her instructor. That's unbelievable for me.

**Master Oliver:** That's incredible. How did you monitor both girls interest and their follow-through and their development as they went through their process?

**Attendee:** Well, Laquita being the baby, she was the shy one. We had some instructors that really took her under their wings, the same way we do it with our students here at Lakewood. We take them under our wings if they're shy. We work with them and try to get them out of their shyness, make them feel good about what they're doing.

But where Natasha was a little bit better prepared than Laquita, of course she was 6 years old, she knew why she was there. Natasha was being bullied in school, so she wanted to have the confidence to stand up to these girls that were hitting her in the face and slapping her around. That was something that she wanted.

So to keep her in was no big deal. She went all the way. She stayed in all the way until she was almost a second-degree. I think she's like a second blue on the third-degree.

But then there's Laquita, who went all the way. She never gave up. She never quit. She's still continued to train and develop as a martial artist.

But monitoring Laquita, at that time, I had my doubts on Laquita but not Natasha. She would go off.

**Master Oliver:** Good. Back when you were making those decisions, you were committing for, paying for, a single dad of 2 daughters, it was a big time commitment, financial commitment. How would you evaluate the way you felt at the time, making all of those commitments, and the way you feel looking back at it?

**Attendee:** These are good questions. I can remember as if it was yesterday and we were paying the tuition. I go, "Girls, you guys better get something out of this, because if we're going to commit to this we're committing all the way."

As a parent, you can say that at the beginning and mean it, but then when your kids say, "Dad, I want to quit," you need to be able to stand up and say, "No, you're not quitting." You're now setting an example for them for the rest of their life.

And as I was paying their tuition, I would go, "Oh my God, I could be driving a Corvette. Oh, my goodness!"

And then I got involved and the tuition went up even further. But yes, I had to sit back and evaluate whether this is going to be something long-term and was it really going to be good for them long-term.

And as a white belt and a gold belt and a father, and as a single parent, you hope that you're making the right decisions. Other parents had told me, "Put your kids in martial arts, it will change their life."

But when your kid is a white belt and a gold belt, you don't see that. If I could have seen, when they were a white belt and a gold belt, what they are now, the money would have been no problem. I wouldn't have stole it, but I would have found somehow to come up with the tuition to get them where they are right now. And it breaks my heart whenever I see one of our kids that we pour our hearts into quit at about red belt, especially brown belt. I'm like, "Man, you're so close! Go all the way to black belt and you'll see a change in you." It's like a caterpillar becoming a butterfly. They totally change.

I watched Laquita, at 6½ years old, just bloom and blossom. I watched Natasha, at 8½, 9 years old, bloom and blossom. Now, both girls are in college. I think I made a great decision, a great investment.

**Master Oliver:** And going back to that point in time, I actually remember that, when you made the decision. I don't think I remember when I did, it had been a long time ago. But when you actually made that decision, just so people don't feel like they're alone in this, did you have some fear, concern, trepidation, and even some resistance to the process at the time?

**Attendee:** Oh, yes sir. Absolutely. Like I say, they were high blue belts at the time, and I had an opportunity to get involved with a class one night on the floor with the girls. Master Brown said, "Come on out on the floor, Mr. Lewis, and join in with your kids." Him and one of your

other instructors, Dave Adam. I said, “Okay,” so I got out on the floor and I worked out a little bit. I thought I was in good shape. I would go to the gym, I walked all day in the restaurant business. I could not get out of bed the next day. I said, “Man, I’m going to try this. This must be really, really good. It made me use some muscles I’ve never used before.”

So, of course, I approached Mr. Adam and I was nervous as a mailman at a dog show. And I said, “I want to do this.”

**Master Oliver:** A mailman at a dog show? I hadn’t heard that one.

**Attendee:** I said, “I want to do this.” And he said, “Before you change your mind, let me give you your uniform.” And I remember today, I walked up to Laquita and I was excited. I go, “Look, Laquita, I am a white belt.” She said, “No Daddy, you are a no belt. You have to earn your white belt.”

Having a 5-year-old look in her daddy’s eyes and say, “No, Daddy, you have to earn your white belt.” She was a high blue belt at the time.

**Master Oliver:** Oh, my goodness.

**Attendee:** But coming through the process, I was so nervous. I was an adult. I was 40 years old when I started. I was an adult. And to get out there and yell? Ha, ha. To say, “Yes, sir!” Come on, I was an educated, college-graduated adult. I was afraid all the way through.

I still get a little nervous when I’m put on the spot. It was a learning experience for me.

**Master Oliver:** Let’s talk about this. I want to give all of our instructors a chance to specific, pointed questions that parents have asked this week for us to walk through all of the answers to any of those questions, and then open it up for anything we haven’t answered.

But I know one of the dads was talking to me just the other day, and he said, “How can it be possible that a 9-year-old was really a black belt?” “Can a 9-year-old kick a 40-year-old’s butt,” was basically the gist of the question.

How do you explain to parents and how do you think of what is a 9-year-old black belt or a 6-year-old black belt, for that matter.

**Attendee:** As far as...?

**Master Oliver:** Can a 6-year-old really be a black belt?

**Attendee:** Oh, absolutely. At their level, they can be a black belt. But you wouldn’t expect a 6-year-old to be able to kick a 40-year-old’s butt. That’s not a good match.

But as far as maturity-wise, intellectually, a 6-year-old is just as much a black belt as I was when I got my black belt. They knew as much knowledge. Of course, I perform at my level and that 6-year-old will perform at his level.

**Master Oliver:** In other words, a 6-year-old is a heck of a lot better than you were.



**Attendee:** Oh, absolutely. I tell parents that today. I say, “You go through with your kid, when they receive their black belt they will know more than you, because they don’t have to worry about feeding them. We do.”

**Master Oliver:** I was joking with Mr. Bowser and Mr. Young recently, because I’ve been out at some of the elementary schools with them and I turned to them one day and I said, “God, I didn’t think kids act like this!” And they said, “Well, you’ve just been spoiled because you’ve been hanging around 100 black belts all the time and haven’t been hanging around the rest of the kids around the area.”

It’s certainly true. We have these events, the black belt weekend retreats and we have the intramural extravaganza, and you can tell the black belts are such a radical department from what the norm is in the schools and the general behavior standards.

Talk about that, what’s happened with Laquita and Natasha and what you’ve seen.

**Attendee:** As far as they’re being mature, the same age, same level as a non-black belt?

**Master Oliver:** Oh, absolutely. And performance of school and the confidence they have, and how that carries over to everything else they do.

**Attendee:** Okay. As the kids got to be about a black belt, like I say, you change at black belt. You develop respect. You understand what we mean when we say, “Respect others,” and how to show that respect.

I watched my girls, they were humble, if that is the correct word. They had no problems. They had no bullies at all.

And I watched Laquita, she went through high school. We moved from Aurora to Lakewood and she went from Rangeview High School, where she had grown up with all the kids, all the kids from the same little neighborhood. They went from elementary school to high school. And when we moved to Lakewood, she went to Green Mountain.

The respect that she had as a senior was unbelievable. I didn’t get this from Laquita, I got this from parents, teachers. We have coaches that have their kids here at Lakewood and Coach Dave walked up to me one day and said, “I just want to tell you I am proud of Laquita.” I go, “Why?” She said, “There was a bunch of boys horsing around, pulling girls’ hair in the hallway, and Laquita walked by and she said, “Cool it, guys,” and they started to turn around and say something to her and they go like, “Oh, yes ma’am!” It’s just the respect that she had. Not that she had to tell everybody, “I’m a black belt,” it was the way she carried herself. She walks with pride, she walks with confidence.

And grades? I don’t have to worry about grades. We tell them from the very beginning, “If you’re going to be a black belt, you must maintain a B average.”

Now that she’s in college and so am I, but I spend like hours studying and I haven’t gone for 30 years. She’s in college and I’m like, “Oh, you got homework?” “Oh, my homework’s done.” “You got homework?” “My homework is done.”

It's just that attitude she has. She has the sense of urgency to get things done. And I think that has a lot to do with that she is a black belt and the training that we teach our black belts. You need to be proactive. Don't wait until the last minute to accomplish something.

And I hope she keeps that all the way through.

Same way with Brandon. Brandon, he's ahead of his homework. If it's due on Friday, it's done on Monday.

**Master Oliver:** Let's go back to, and I talked about this a little bit in prefacing and giving some background, but we had the instructors come up with a list of questions that they've had from parents recently. And one of them was, "Why do I have to make a decision as a white belt on whether I'm going to train to black belt or not? Why can't I do this for a year or 2 or 3 years and then make the decision?"

It's both an empirical proof that we have run the numbers over the years and, again, with thousands of students taking a look at this, but we also know it from just our instinctual working with students. The ones that are committed – and it's got to be the parents and the child committed and it's got to be the instructor's committed to the family, they're the ones that actually get all of the things we promise.

What we do when a new student comes in the doors or when a new parent is talking to us about the program, we make some pretty heady promises. We say, "Your child, no matter what age when they're a black belt, is going to walk with their head high. And they're going to be confident in any situation." We say, "They'll most likely be a straight-A student. If not, they'll be performing at the absolute upper end of their own aptitudes and capabilities. We say that they'll be confident with themselves.

Now, that doesn't mean they're going to be able to take on a gang of 5 adults downtown, but they're going to be confident of their capabilities physically.

Again, a 9-year-old is not going to end up in a fist fight with a 35-year-old and come out on top, no matter what rank they are.

But we also are very clear in the emotional development, the level of discipline and focus and confidence. But there's just an aura that the kids that are black belts have that nobody else has. And it's interesting because it's confident, but not cocky. And it's humble, but not shy. And it's polite without being differential to authority or to adults. But polite without having low self-esteem. So it's a high self-esteem, high self-concept aptitude for success without being the type of cocky that some people associate with all of that.

I think sometimes it's difficult for people to understand, though, why it's so important to make a commitment at an early stage. How would you explain that?

**Attendee:** Like you said in the very beginning, if you're not committed to a goal then you won't make that decision. And I think that the earlier you make a decision that, "Hey, we're going to do this," the more committed that child will be.

If the parent is behind the child, the child will be committed. Of course, like I say, and I tell the kid, "There will be times when you will not want to come to class because you want to stay and

play with your friends. But understand this. Your friends will be there when you get back after your class.”

So I would say white belt is when you’re most excited. Make that commitment. The earlier, the better. Don’t wait. I’ve seen people wait until they’re blue belts and say, “I’m going to make the decision to be a black belt at blue belt.” No. If you wait until you’re a blue belt, you’re just going to be a blue belt. You don’t want to do that.

The earlier, the better to set that goal.

**Master Oliver:** What we teach, and of course we teach the kids a lot about goal setting, there’s no such thing as a really big goal that’s not without some obstacles. Whether that’s to be a straight-A student or whether it’s to climb Mt. Everest, or anything in between.

If you don’t have your eye on a really exciting and empowering long-term goal, then the short-term, day-to-day obstacles suddenly seem big and insurmountable.

But if you’ve got your eye focused on that big, long-term, exciting goal, then those day-to-day obstacles fade away into oblivion.

There are going to be obstacles on the way to any goal, including getting a black belt. There’s going to be times when a form is difficult to master or is confusing. There’s going to be times, like you talked about as an adult, that you’re sore and you don’t necessary feel like going to exercise today. And there’s going to be all kinds of other little obstacles that may come up.

But if a child is focused on being a black belt and the parents are focused on that child being a black belt, then the day-to-day stuff doesn’t mean that much.

I think back to you’re working on your MBA now, and I did mine, but when I was at Georgetown I think back to where if your goal at college wasn’t really to be a graduate and to get that bachelor’s degree and perhaps go on to graduate school or whatever your career’s going to be beyond that, the mid-terms really seem insurmountable.

But if you’re focused on the outcome, on the graduating, then the mid-terms are just one more obstacle, one more thing that you have to go through in order to get to the long-term outcome.

So it’s not as difficult and it certainly doesn’t psychologically feel nearly as difficult.

Let’s talk about – because this is a relatively new implementation for us – the difference between Leadership and Master Club.

The way I’ve been explaining it is that what we’ve been doing for 22 years is we’ve been doing an incredibly strong Leadership program, except that most of what we’re now teaching in the Leadership program we were teaching at second-, third-, fourth-degree black belt. We weren’t teaching it to students under black belt.

And I look at all of our instructors, and the intramural was exciting because we had 12 rings running, we had 3 black belts in each ring, we had 36 black belts out there on the floor – and actually 2 or 3 times that many at any one time – out there running on the floor. And each instructor that we had out there was phenomenal. They’re a product of the Leadership program in the way that we’ve run it in the past. And now, we’re running it so that starting as early as

level one, which is orange, green, purple and blue belt, the curriculum that used to be taught at second-degree black belt is now being taught into the orange, green, purple and blue belt level.

So it's a dramatic and exciting way to accelerate the process. And what we're seeing is somebody now, by the time they're a brown or black belt, will have the same leadership skills that we used to have at third-degree black belt.

Talk a little bit about that, Master Lewis. It's been a phenomenal transition that we've seen and have accelerated the pace even of the black belts now.

**Attendee:** Yes, that is true. When I sit down and talk to my parents, I tell them the reason why I suggest Leadership is because, as you were just saying, we used to get leadership at second-degree. I told them, "Hey, if myself and Miss Lewis had to start training in leadership back when we were a gold belt, just think where we would be right now. We did not start getting this type of training until we were second-degree black belts. And from second- to fourth-degree, we probably just completed all of the stuff that you guys are going to have by the time you are a first-degree black belt. This is unbelievable, the knowledge that you're getting. The persuasion skills, the leadership skills, the public speaking skills, not to mention the advanced curriculum, the advanced weaponry. You're learning so much and you're developing."

I tell them, "At the end of every class, there's 15 minutes. Think about it. In 15 minutes, in 5 years, you could be master of anything, any one subject. So if you study Leadership, by the time your child is a first-degree black belt, almost a second-degree black belt, they will know stuff that mom and dad never even thought of in your daily work life."

**Master Oliver:** Oh, absolutely. And we have some parents who are high-level professionals, training huge staffs of people themselves and their company. We're picking up the same book and the same training materials working with a 9-year-old and carrying it back to their company.

So it's a pretty exciting thing, and it's a very advanced process that we work with many experts, both in education and psychology and leadership overall, to put the pieces together.

Let's change gears here just for a second. We don't want to go on forever here, but it's a very exciting topic, I know, for all of our instructors and for you and I. Let's talk about this. We've had a couple of parents who wonder why are we so focused and so concerned with the concept of black belt? And why do all of our instructors – I know they all do – why are they all so hectically pitching the concepts to the kids and to the parents that they want to be a black belt?

Let's give your perspective and I'll give my perspective on that, and why it's such a strong point of focus for all of our instructors.

**Attendee:** My take on that is that black belt is the beginning of the training. By the time you go from white belt to black belt, you're going to learn just a basic knowledge of what it takes to be somebody important. And when you step into that black belt-hood, and that's what we want everybody to do – we tell everybody, "We are a black belt school" – because we know that once you hit there, your whole level of thinking is totally different.

It's kind of like if you were graduating from high school, going into college. When you get out of high school and go into college, your level of thinking is no longer high school. You go back

in a year, you go back and look at the high school people, how they act, you go like, “Man, that is so childish.”

Your level of thinking increases. You rise above the masses. You see the bigger picture at black belt.

So from first-degree to second-degree, it is a totally different world. We just want everybody to step into that world, step into it and see it. And black belt is recognized all over the world. And everybody knows if you achieve a black belt, you have done something. It was something that was not given to you. It's the same when you get a college degree from a reputable college, they know you have done something. You've worked your tail off to get that, and they respect that.

**Master Oliver:** The other element, as well, is with our particular organization is it's very much like getting a degree from Harvard or from Oxford or from Stanford is the organization itself. And therefore, the degree confers it's internationally recognized as a standard of excellence.

So that's a wonderful benefit that our students have is that level of recognition.

Another way that I like to think about it, and I just want to leapfrog off of what you said, Master Lewis, is our instructors are really no different in their focus than a really good high school teacher would be or a really good college professor or a really good teacher in any other venue.

And if I had my child at a quality high school with a quality teacher, I want them to be selling my child on 2 things very strongly. One is I want them to be selling my child on following through with high school and getting a high grade point average and going on and pursuing my education at a higher level. And the really good teachers out there are constantly focused on their children's success and getting them to the next level, getting them to a higher level.

Clearly, if I'm a college professor, I want to be selling the kids on the value of applying themselves to their studies, setting some long-term goals with their career. And whether it's to go on to graduate training after their college degree or whether it's to get their college degree and go on to their next career step, I want that professor to be selling my child on following-through with college and taking the next step and staying with long-term goals.

And our instructors are no different. Being successful in martial arts is not training for 50 classes and dropping out, but being successful in martial arts is setting a goal initially to be a first-degree black belt and then setting a goal for a martial arts lifestyle, which is the character and the integrity and the perseverance, as well as the confidence and the physical skills development.

So all of our instructors are focused on the child being truly successful in the school, as well as developing all of the traits and the talents and the outcomes that we're promising them on a regular basis.

So I look at it that way, as well. Our role of all of our instructors is to push, pull and motivate the kids, and the adults as well, to get to the highest level of excellence within martial arts that they're capable of becoming.

Anything to add to that?

**Attendee:** No sir, not at this time.

**Master Oliver:** Okay. Let's talk about a couple of other questions that I've had recently, or a couple of our other instructors, and I'll let the rest of the instructors chip into anything that we haven't covered so far.

One I had right here, a parent was asking me about the tuition and the structure of the tuition. I guess they had a perception that maybe it was a lot of money to get to your black belt and beyond. And I want to get your take on this.

But the way I think about it is we only have one challenge. And our challenge is to get each of the parents to imagine what the future looks like, when their child, 3 or 4 years from now, steps out on that stage at the extravaganza, walks into class, has a black belt on, and has achieved everything that a black belt entails.

And then, to put a value on the education that, over the last 3 years after they've achieved their black belt, what that was worth.

So we start with we have never in history, and this goes back 22 years before that, my time at the Jhun Rhee Institute. Never had anybody achieve their black belt who felt like the time, effort and money wasn't worth the effort. In fact, they've always felt like it was worth 5, 10, 15, 20 times the effort and 5, 10, 15 times the financial commitment.

But I think a lot of times the parents don't understand the structure of the financial commitment and also the long-term value of the program. And they look at it in the wrong way.

As we've looked at structuring the program and structuring the program as it goes with it, we've done 2 pieces with it. And one is the actual Master Club process, going through the curriculum of first-degree and second-degree and then picking up leadership skills at second-degree, the way we've done it historically, the actual commitment through to black belt, the true monthly cost of the program actually ends up being less than what our trial enrollment is. And the overall tuition per lesson goes down even more dramatically.

The Leadership program is a bump in the monthly tuition and is a bump in the per-lesson cost.

And then we have a couple of different ways of structuring it. What most of the parents do is they end up figuring out how to pay one payment on the program.

The reason they do that is we pay a billing company to do the accounting and follow-up on the billing, so our instructors don't have to. In fact, anything we can get out of having to deal with at the schools that doesn't entail actually teaching the kids and helping them get to black belt we're trying to farm out, we pass on the savings that the billing company charges us plus give an additional 20% discount.

So most parents are actually able to lower their payments, not increase their payments by at least going through the Master Club process. Obviously, there's an awful lot more value added to the Leadership.

Master Lewis, talk about your perception from both sides, as a parent struggling, as a single parent struggling with 2 kids, and then now, looking back at several hundred black belts that you've worked with over the years.

**Attendee:** As a parent, when I was coming up through the ranks, we were white-topped. At that time, we had a program called the Black Belt Club. That was the red top.

My girls said, "Dad, I want their red top." I go, "What's a red top?" They said, "That means I want to be a black belt." I said, "Man, are you committed to black belt? Man, I am paying a lot. I'm a single dad, have a house payment, a car payment." Of course, I was driving a piece of junk, but it still was my car payment. We were struggling.

But they wanted to be black belts, so I said, "Okay, let's go and be a black belt."

And once we got the red top, they changed. Their whole attitude changed. They would practice at home without me saying, "Go practice." Natasha took Laquita under her arm and started working with her to make sure that, "Hey, let's do this. We're going to be black belts! We're going to be just like Miss Trommety. She's 12 years old and she's a black belt. We're going to be a young black belt. Everybody's going to look up to us and call us Miss Lewis." I was sitting around listening to them talk like that.

And then we came to the Master's Club. The Master's Club was going to go to second-degree. I remember you sitting and talking to us one day at Arvada, and you said, "Guys, I'm going to give you guys a Christmas present. You guys go to Master Club, you have a lifetime commitment in martial arts."

I looked at my girls and said, "Man, we are going to do this! We're going to go all the way. We aren't quitting."

And I'd met some friends along the way, River Sanchez and some other guys. And it's like, "Let's do this!"

So all of us, we joined Master Club. We wanted to stay. Martial arts was going to become a way of life. And as a parent, that's what we wanted and that's what we did. We made that sacrifice to make that happen.

And now, as an instructor, I see all kinds of parents. I see most of our parents are single parents. So I can feel empathetic with them because I know how they feel. I felt the same way when we were coming through the ranks.

So if they just make that commitment, if they can just see the bigger picture, look down the road and imagine what your kid is going to get out of this program, it won't be money wasted. It won't be money wasted.

Today's money, what is going to come to your child in the future, you can't touch it. As a matter of fact, I had a parent come in today. I had a young man, the parent could not afford it, could not afford it. I know she couldn't afford it. She took her kid out at green belt. Six months later, she was spending twice as much, 3 times as much, 4 times as much trying to keep her teenage kid in jail. Now, they have to send him to kind of like Peace Corp, something like that.

She goes, "Master Lewis, when he was here he gave me respect. He went to school every day." She said, "The worst thing I ever did was to take my child out of martial arts. But I didn't see it."

**Master Oliver:** The long-term outcome, I always like to explain to parents, “Obviously, we’re running martial arts schools and obviously we feel like it’s in our best interest and the parents are going to feel like it’s in our best interest to talk them into it. But the ultimate outcome and the ultimate verification is to talk to any black belt in the organization, watch any black belt class, talk to any black belt parent, read the feedback that we have, watch the video or the audiotape. And most important, go tap them on the shoulder and say, “Tell me about whether this was worth it or not and tell me why you did this, and tell me what you achieved.”

Universally, there will be no exceptions, they’re going to hear the same type of things that we’re talking about here. We have never had a black belt who said, “Yeah, I just wasted 4 years and wasted a lot of money and wasted a lot of time on doing this, because we didn’t get anything out of it.” Never happened. Hasn’t happened in 22 years. Won’t happen in another 40 years.

Let’s talk to some of the other instructors here. Do we have some other questions that have been brought up in the schools recently that we haven’t addressed? We’ve been on the phone for quite a while, but is there anything we’ve missed here?

**Attendee:** I have one. We have a bunch of great students in our school here in Englewood, but we had one parent that had a question for me and said that her student is a straight-A student, she’s doing great in school, she’s doing great at home, and wants to know what other things Leadership will add to that. I was wondering what you would say.

**Master Oliver:** I’ll go first here, Master Lewis. The number one thing, I think, over the years, as most people know, we’ve worked really tightly with the school systems. Our third black belt in the foundation of Mile High Karate was Dr. Lorenzo Trohio, who was the Director of Humanities for Jeff Co. schools, was in the running for Superintendent for Aurora Public Schools, works right now with Adam County Schools.

What we were finding is that in the school systems there’s 2 ends of the spectrum where kids end up having problems eventually, and that’s the gifted and talented group and that’s the kids who are at the lower end of the scale.

What martial arts does for kids at any level, but especially for the kids who are at the high end, is it provides an ongoing positive peer group.

As all parents know, as a child moves through middle school and moves through high school, they’re at risk of interacting with, befriending with, associating with people who don’t share the attitude, the values, the philosophy that the parents have and may have a negative mentality towards school, may have a negative mentality about their own health and well-being, whether that be drugs and alcohol and cigarettes or whether that’s just some other type of abuse, and are possible to develop a negative attitude.

What our black belts have is they have an extremely powerful peer environment where there’s an awful lot of peer pressure, and the peer pressure is towards doing well in school and living a healthy lifestyle and succeeding in a very positive manner with a very positive attitude. It doesn’t take much observation to look at the black belts and how they interact to see that.

So no matter where you’re at on the spectrum, you always need to be looking for that positive peer group and looking for that development process.



Second is even if a child is already an A student, that doesn't mean that they have a place where they can be a mentor and they can be a leader and they can have public speaking skills. And there's very few places that I know of, that they can learn how to motivate other people, to be effective and persuasive with other people, to lead by example, and to set a positive example for other people. Those skills carry over into absolutely everything.

Master Lewis, what would you add to that?

**Attendee:** I would agree with you 100% that the skills that we learn through martial arts will follow you the rest of your life; through college, through your work life, through home life. I agree with you 100%.

**Master Oliver:** My own experience, I started training when I was 10 years old and ended up as a national merit scholar and an A student in high school and getting an honor scholarship to college and then working my way through college in Washington, at Georgetown, but I attribute that to martial arts. I certainly wasn't a very good student going into the process, and I attribute martial arts to making me into a good student and developing a high level of confidence, where I didn't have a very high level of confidence when I started.

But for the kids who are already sailing along and doing a great job, there's a lot of kids who are going to become great kids and great adults without martial arts training, but it's that extra support mechanism and that extra assurance that the peers are going to be good peers, that the development and attitude and leadership skills are going to be there, success skills are going to be taught in a real focused and scientific way.

Daphne, does that help a little bit?

**Attendee:** It does. That's basically what I told our parents. I just wanted to give her some feedback on what everybody else would say.

**Master Oliver:** Sure. Any other instructors, any other parent questions that we've had, that we haven't addressed so far? No?

**Attendee:** I do have another one.

**Master Oliver:** Go ahead, Daphne.

**Attendee:** I had another one of our parents, who we'd talked about it, and the child is very interested in being in the Leadership program. Their child is 7 years old.

It's like my daughter. When she decided she wanted to do it, the only reason she could give me that she wanted to go into the Master Club was because she wanted to wear a black shirt.

Just like with Master Lewis and his kids, the minute she did put on that black top, that was all she talked about was she wanted to be a black belt at age 7. So that was pretty good.

But one of the questions I get from my parents, one of my parents, they're in the basic and orientation program. They asked me if they could just keep in that program and also still become a black belt.

**Master Oliver:** Oh, okay. There's 2 questions buried in there. One is does a 7-year-old really benefit from the type of leadership thing we're talking about? So you're talking about whether it's a 4-year-old, 5-year-old, 6-year-old or 7-year-old, a child that young, are they really going to benefit from that type of leadership training or is it really too much over their head, too young?

And I think the proof in that is if you look at the kids who are 6, 7, 8, 9 years old who are getting their black belt, and they're able to run a class of 20 or 30 or 40 people, and they're able to interact in a leadership role with other kids their own age, and they're able to step up to the plate and really not only take responsibility for themselves and do things without having to be told, but to lead, persuade and support other kids who are peers or even older than they are in a very effective and focused way. So it's a marvelous outcome for them.

The other question is, "Can I just stay in the orientation process and eventually be a black belt?" The answer's no. We've designed the program to have 2 tracks. Track number one is, "I'm going into a trial basis, I'm going to be in martial arts for 12 months and I'm moving on to something else." And the orientation basics class, if somebody takes that track, is designed to make sure they get some permanent benefit from the martial arts training, that they learn some skills that they can apply, they learn some mental attitudes and habits that they can apply, that they learn some life skills that are going to be a positive influence on them from then on. But it's not designed to give them a black belt.

The Master Club and the Leadership Program are like the college prep programs that are designed with the curriculum and the focus in mind, to get somebody to black belt and beyond.

That's why by the time somebody's an orange belt, we want to make sure that they're either on the black belt path – and, therefore, we've put all of the pieces together to get them to black belt – or they've just decided this is a good thing to have a foundation in.

If that's the case, and being a black belt isn't for everybody and we don't suggest that it is, but if that's the case we want to make sure that the year orientation into martial arts is going to have been valuable and they're going to learn foundational skills that are going to be useful both in life skills, focus and discipline, and also in the martial arts training and self-defense applications.

We're going to have to wrap up here in a couple seconds.

Any other questions that we haven't addressed adequately?

**Attendee:** Master Oliver, I actually had a question the other day, because we are a fairly young location – not a young school, but this location, proximity here is pretty young – "How do I know that you're going to be here long enough for my son to become a black belt?"

How would you answer that? I do pretty well, but how would you articulate that better?

**Master Oliver:** I think that's an excellent question. And anybody doing their due diligence should ask that question.

The proof is in the fact that we're coming up on our 22<sup>nd</sup> anniversary coming up next year. Mile High Karate has never had anybody training to black belt who hasn't been able to follow through. And frankly, the schools are so busy and growing so fast this fall, I don't think there's any likelihood that any particular location won't be very highly successful.

As you know, Amanda, our objective is to grow to 15, then 18, then 20, then 27 locations in the greater expanded metropolitan area. So we're going to be adding locations. Of course, we've got 9 locations now.

But we've had a tremendous success rate, both with the schools and with our position in the industry. But most importantly, with the student success over the years. So I would say the likelihood is essentially 100% that not only will Mile High Karate be here, but there will be a location that will be there to satisfy their needs.

Certainly, over the years, we've moved locations a couple blocks down the street or across the street, based upon buying real estate or moving locations and so forth. We've had a couple shopping centers that were renovated, and we had to move across the street.

But we're definitely going to be here for the long haul. And the proof of the thousands of people that we've developed through the process and the hundreds of black belts that we have currently in the program, there's certainly proof that we're looking and historic. But we're on a role. We're going to be here for the long term.

**Attendee:** Absolutely. Okay, great. Thank you.

**Master Oliver:** You bet. Is there a last question or do we need to wrap up here?

**Attendee:** Master Oliver, this is Master Gonzalez.

**Master Oliver:** Yes, Master Gonzalez?

**Attendee:** I had one question and I stepped away for just a second and you may have answered it already, but I had a father ask me today, "My son's only 5. Is he going to benefit from this?"

**Master Oliver:** Yeah. We were talking about that in terms of leadership. Master Gonzalez, as you know, I have a 3½-year-old. All of the educational research shows that the younger a child is, the faster they learn.

The adult reaction to the other children is that they're not learning or they're not making very good progress. And it's an interesting paradox that, as you watch a 3-year-old or a 4-year-old or a 5-year-old in a classroom, that they may seem to be lost or perplexed or not keeping pace.

But as we've seen over and over and over through the years, of course, we just had Brian Sushy get his black belt at 6 years old, we just had Nicko Johnson get his fourth-degree black belt at 16. He was a 6-year-old black belt. Obviously, Laquita. What was she, about 2½ feet tall when she got her black belt. A little bitty thing.

We have seen over the years that a 5-year-old now, who's going to be a black belt when they're 8, there's nothing more powerful than that. What they're going to have developed over that process is going to be so dramatic. And their rate of absorbing the material is just incredible.

Now, again, they don't overtly show it for a while. Like in Nicko Johnson's case, I think it took like 20, 24 months before it really looked like he was getting it. But by the time he got to his black belt in second degree, he was phenomenal.

Other parents are going to find exactly the same thing. They're going to find that their child may take a while to really get the idea. But once they get the idea and put all of the pieces together, the growth rate and the outcome is just outrageous.

You don't have to look very far to look at the many, many, many, many 6-, 7-, 8-year-old black belts we've had recently and see how much they've accomplished to know that.

Again, as you know from your own experience, the younger they start, up to a point – we haven't figured out how to teach a 2-year-old yet – 3½, 4 years old, when they get started at a young age, the younger they start the better their eventual outcome is. So it's just a phenomenal development process.

Just think about how powerful it is to be a black belt in fourth, fifth or sixth grade.

I think we're going to have to wrap up here, because we've gone about an hour. We've hit a lot of ground. Any one last question? No?

Hopefully, we've hit just about everything that's on everybody's plate or that hasn't been real clear. But again, there's a couple of things that start out being very important.

One is it's very important, for a while or gold belt, for the family to make a decision long-term, to treat this as a school and to follow-through and be really serious about this. Because without that commitment follow-through, just like any other school, the success rate isn't good and the outcomes that we promise can't be achieved.

Number 2 is all you have to do is do your own due diligence. Talk to black belts, talk to any of the families that we've dealt with on a long-term basis. Research Mile High Karate as much as you want. You'll find that none of this is just a sales pitch, it's the reality of what happens. And it's just up to the parents to make a decision on what it is they want to get out of it and make sure that it's tuned in with their philosophy.

And the third is, obviously, all children are going to lose interest and be excited the next day. And as long as you have a long-term outcome and a focused regular class attendance, they will get a black belt and they will achieve an incredible amount. But mostly, that's with parent and family support.

Master Lewis, anything to add to that?

**Attendee:** No, sir. I think we did a pretty good job.

**Master Oliver:** Of covering all the ground.

**Attendee:** Of covering the ground, absolutely.

**Master Oliver:** If there are any other questions, parents are welcome to email it or ask the instructors, and what we're doing with this and then replaying it to help deal with the load of the number of new students that we have.

Amanda talked about our longevity. We're growing fast and we've got an awful lot of new students in the system. And as we've talked about with our instructors, we've got about 500

people that we're trying to explain the process and let them evaluate one way or the other on what they're going to do.

So it's a really exciting time and growth period for Mile High Karate, but it's also a challenge on resources.

But anyway, I think we'd better wrap up for the night. We've been on here for a long time. And hopefully, we've answered a lot of questions for people.

**Attendee:** Thank you, sir.

**Master Oliver:** Thank you.

**Attendee:** Thank you, sir. And good night to everyone.

**Master Oliver:** Thank you.