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A TEAM OF BLACK BELTS

Does Not Equal A Black Belt Team!

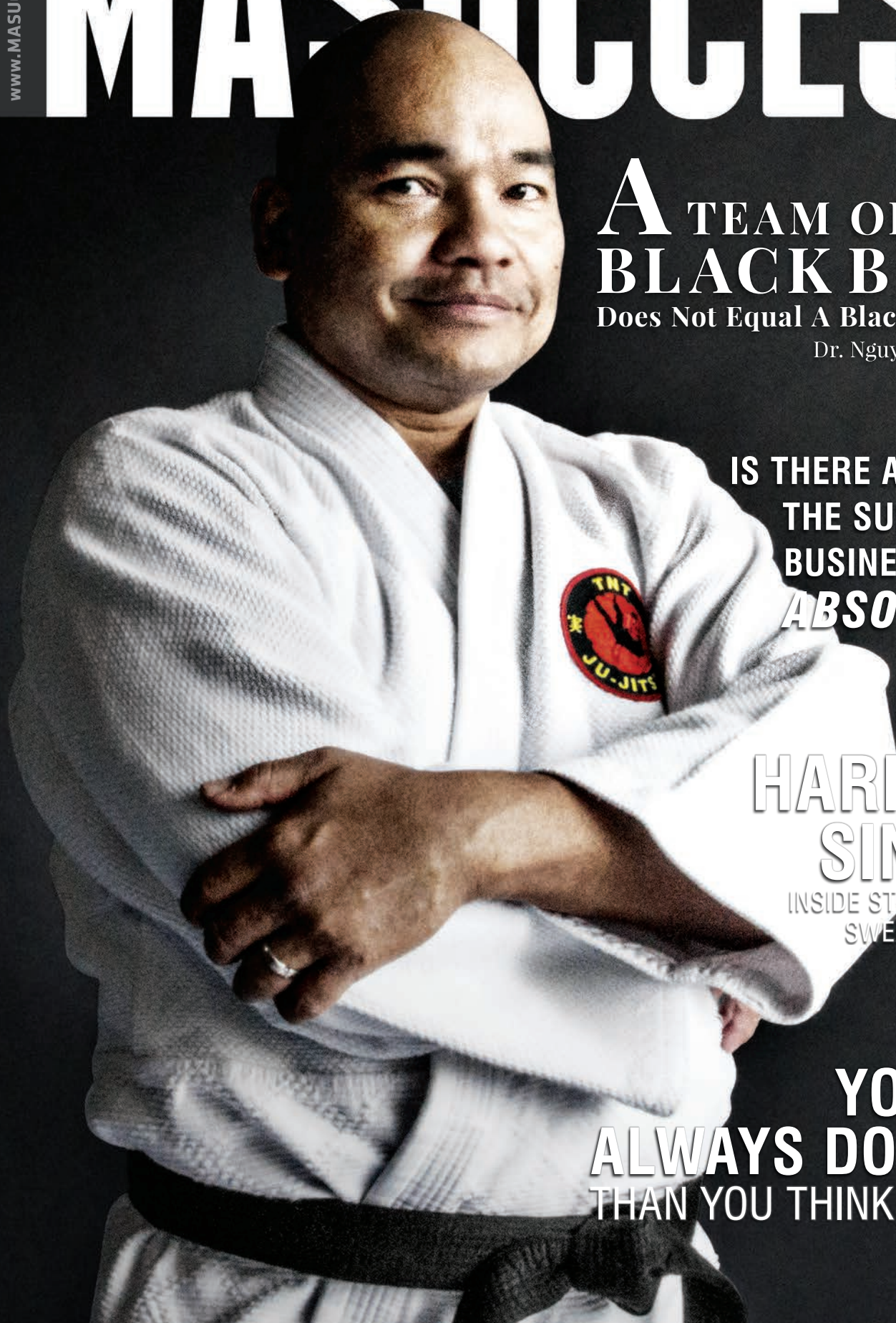
Dr. Nguyen "Tom" Griggs

IS THERE A CURE FOR
THE SUMMERTIME
BUSINESS BLUES?
ABSOLUTELY!

HARINDER SINGH'S

INSIDE STORY OF BLOOD,
SWEAT AND GLORY!

**YOU CAN
ALWAYS DO MORE
THAN YOU THINK YOU CAN**



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"TOUGH TIMES GO AWAY. TOUGH PEOPLE DON'T."

— WALTER PEYTON,
PRO FOOTBALL RUNNING BACK





A TEAM BLACK OF BELTS Does Not Equal A Black Belt Team!

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Education and academic achievement are important to me and the TNT Jujitsu community.

Happiness and Success Are *Your* Choice

A man goes to the same diner three days a week for 10 years. He always eats the greasiest, fattest and unhealthiest items on the menu. Eventually, he develops some pretty severe health problems that require hospitalization and result in expensive medical bills.

So, the man decides to sue the diner, claiming that their food made him unhealthy. He and the lady who owns the diner appear in court and the judge asks them to explain their grievances.

The man says, "Your Honor, this lady's business willfully and intentionally fed me unhealthy food for over 10 years, and now I want compensation for my pain and suffering. It's her fault for making and selling that terrible food to me!"

The diner's owner exclaims, "Your Honor, this is crazy! He came into the diner for 10 years, three days a week and chose those dishes! No one made him eat that food; he chose to order those items!"

Now, if I asked you about your thoughts on this case, most of you would say it sounds crazy and silly. The diner offers a variety of dishes on its menu. While some of them are un-

healthy, the customer chose to eat the bad dishes that caused him to have health problems, right?

Well, consider this: How many of us go to our schools and gyms where we willingly choose to interact with others in unhealthy ways? Just as the man in the story chose the bad items from the menu, we decide to show up in an unprofessional and unproductive manner. Consequently, when disagreements or tensions arise, we blame others for the school's problems when we actually chose to contribute to the chaos.

Often, I have a very common but odd experience when I'm presenting a seminar. At some point, a person who is in a non-leadership position and someone that *is* in leadership position from the same organization will confide in me the same existing problem – but at differing times. That problem is, the company really needs my help because of incompetent leadership and clueless/useless workers.

Each side sees the other as being problematic, insubordinate, micromanaging and, basically, the worst! But it's clear that *both sides* need help. In fact, all of the people I have worked with want to learn how to be part of a black belt-level team with black belt-level leaders. Yet, just as with the diner story, both sides choose to perpetuate problems that will eventually become costly and painful for everyone.

Let's examine team models and how to choose success and happiness.

Patchworks, Rock Stars and Old-Schoolers

There are three primary types of team models that I have experienced during my life in the martial arts. This listing is by no means comprehensive but it does provide a good starting point.

Around 1994, a friend and mentor named Ned Cherry took me to his aikido dojo. I had just developed an ulcer from college-related stress, and a recent breakup had me in a bad place emotionally. Ned assured me that aikido would be very helpful to me, and I'm grateful to him for introducing me to martial arts.

When I got to the dojo, I was amazed to see a variety of people working together, getting thrown around and having their joints twisted. The sensei moved between each group making corrections and had a sense of seriousness and warmth. His black belts helped the lower belts and would find time to train with each other.

This example of teamwork is what I call the "Patchwork" model. The sensei would tell the class about their techniques and everyone simply trained and helped teach as needed. All the higher belts understood what was asked of them, and helped to build the knowledge "quilt" by teaching techniques in the way that they felt was best.

In schools with an informal and easygoing teaching style, this team model works nicely. However, it can also be problematic, because it's very easy for things to get *too* loose and unstructured.

Teams may lack a sense of uniformity resulting in confusion about leadership. Also, instructors and students can start to play favorites and some-

An emphasis on the basics at all times is a component of our success.



times cliques can form.

One solution for Patchwork problems is to establish a strong hierarchy and teaching foundation for all instructors. Additionally, make sure that the students know the hierarchy, and have your instructors work with different groups to keep things varied.

After aikido, I attended several schools that were competition-based. I soon discovered that the students who won medals or trophies were given teaching and leadership roles. This is known as the "Rock Star" team model. These people have some level of rank and usually teach according to class/age levels. But, they attain leadership roles through their accomplishments in competition.

A major benefit to the Rock Star model is that your team of instructors and leaders knows what it takes to win. The flipside of this model, however, is that there's an assumption that winners are leaders and teachers. Whether you're a great competitor or a top sales earner, it doesn't necessarily make you leadership material. If you want proof,

look at the programs and materials focusing on instructor training and leadership development. Medals, trophies and titles show your ability to beat – not teach and lead – other people.

A way to remedy Rock Star-related issues is to expand your requirements for teaching and leadership roles. Depending on the age range of your students and instructors, elements such as academic performance and non-martial arts based components can add more depth to your instructor pool. Remember, a winning attitude can take you farther than being in first place.

The last model is quite familiar to many martial artists and one that my current school uses. When I came to TNT Jujitsu, which teaches traditional, Japanese jujitsu, I was impressed by the level of respect and formal etiquette. Instructors and leaders were expected to put their time in learning steadily and methodically. Many of us know this model as the “Old-School” way of doing things. The Old-School model emphasizes attention, focus and patience, thereby allowing people to bond and learn the curriculum.

One of the main problems with doing it “Old School” is that teams can become very much like exclusive clubs. People that want to contribute might feel excluded and not valued, because they haven’t put in enough time or they’re not part of the leadership team. An obvious solution for this is to hear people out, no matter what their role is in your school.

A related problem is that some Old-School thinkers tend to adhere to the “If-it-ain’t-broke-don’t-fix-it” mindset, which can hinder innovation and change. At TNT Jujitsu, we’ve had some issues with Old-School thinking, but we’ve made great strides in being more open and inclusive. We implemented one solution to deal with this problem. We allow a student or parent to try his or her idea out (depending upon the idea) on a smaller scale and showcase the results. If we see an idea working, then we explore and implement it further.

All of these models (Patchwork, Rock Star and Old-School) teach us several valuable lessons. One lesson is that *all* schools and gyms have various models of teamwork, and we all probably are a blend of these types. Secondly, *no model is perfect*. Being fluid, but grounded in your mission, is a key to helping create successful teams.

Creating Black Belt Teams

Just as great leaders are created, developed and nurtured, so are black belt teams. When you plan on building your black belt-level team, you need to look at several factors and take a few steps that are simple and helpful. The following is a short list of concepts and practices you can use to help build or strengthen your teams.

Ask great questions and actively listen to the answers. The premise of John Maxwell’s *Good Leaders Ask Great Questions* is that successful leaders improve and develop themselves and their people through the asking of outstanding questions. It’s very helpful to be thoughtful and reflective before asking questions of your team. Often, we can come from a “reactionary” rather than a “responsive” mindset. Doing so results in interactions that cause hurt feelings, create resentment and lead to pushback from our people.

So, if your questions are coming from a good place, then you’re more likely to get



Receiving my doctorate. It took nine years, but I did it!

meaningful answers and *not* drama.

Another aspect of great questions is to ensure that, as a leader, we accept being questioned by our people, too. Despite the history of many martial arts, the days of absolute devotion to the instructor without question are over. The value of listening to and answering questions from your team cannot be overstated, especially if you’re trying to create and maintain a great team.

If you want an example of some truly great questions, look at these three from legendary college football coach Lou Holtz. He asked his team these questions regularly to gauge *where* they are and *who* they are:

1. Can I trust you?
2. Do you care about me?
3. Are you committed to excellence?

Now, think about the type of conversations and growth that can happen using questions related to the sentiments of trust, care and commitment.

Perform a needs and skills assessment of your team. What skills, traits and abilities do you need your team members to have in order for your school to become successful? Do you need more social me-

“As a leader, if you won’t listen to what [your marketing people] are telling you and take their advice accordingly, then you’re wasting their time and yours. Since marketing is a broad field, something to keep in mind is how many successful campaigns has this person been part of and what was his or her role in the campaign?”



With my Sensei, friend and the owner of TNT Jujitsu, Hanshi Torey Overstreet.

“A major benefit to the [competition-oriented] ‘Rock Star’ model is that your team of instructors and leaders knows what it takes to win. The flipside of this model, however, is that there’s an assumption that winners are leaders and teachers. Medals, trophies and titles show your ability to beat — not teach and lead — other people.”

What remains of my childhood home. For safety reasons, the City of Houston would later demolish it.



BUILDING BLACK BELT TEAMS

A team of black belts (literally or figuratively) doesn’t equal a black belt (performance-level) team. Time and again, I’m asked: 1) What is a black belt team, and 2) How do you create a black belt team?

First, let’s describe a black belt team using the work outlined by Jim Collins in his book, *Good to Great*. Collins and his team identified the factors that made some companies good and others great.

One distinction that he made is: *Being a good team is actually the enemy of being a great team*. For Collins, good is the enemy of great, because being “good” means a team or organization will settle

for less than what they could achieve. But the effort to become great means people will undoubtedly become uncomfortable because of the tough requirements.

Collins notes that discipline (something all martial artists should practice) in our people, thoughts and actions helps to achieve greatness. The following is a short, non-comprehensive list of areas that Collins identified as being essential for teams to be great:

Communications. They communicate so well that everyone seems to have telepathy. Everyone knows his or her roles, can readily ask for help or offer advice to another team member almost

instantly. No assumptions! The team asks and tells for complete clarity.

Technical Skills. The team members can actually do their jobs and other members’ jobs if needed. From working the front desk to teaching a private lesson, another team member should be able to help out or fill in should you need it.

Mentoring/Training. Black belt teams develop through constant learning, practice and improving their craft. They also focus on helping each member of the team grow and mentor the next level of team members. Your knowledge is a gift and, like gifts, you need to share it with others for everyone’s benefit and growth.

dia proficiency? Is there a shortage of help for special events? Or do you need more instructors for growing numbers? Perhaps you require more administrative and clerical abilities from the front-desk person.

Understanding your needs and skills-based issues will help you create the right team or better develop your current one.

A classic example is having people on your team that have marketing backgrounds. These people may be instructors and work in the marketing profession. But keep in mind that if you ask them for help, they will tell you things from their perspective and experience.

As a leader, if you won't listen to what they're telling you and take their advice accordingly, then you're wasting their time and yours. Since marketing is a broad field, something to keep in mind is how many successful campaigns has this person been part of and what was his or her role in the campaign?

Lastly, when you assess your team's needs and everyone's skills, keep these points in mind. Remember that everyone does *not* see how good he or she really is. Also, people cannot always see their potential as you see it. Consequently, they won't see themselves as you see them. Finally, some people are very skillful, but want to keep that part of them separate from other parts of their life.

At TNT Jujitsu, we have had several team members, students and parents over the years that were talented artists, writers and musicians. But trying to get them to consistently use those skills for promoting and growing the school has been tough. We all know people in our schools that we have tried to encourage or even contract to write a mini-comic strip, develop a children's book or create a song/jingle for us. Sometimes, we can confuse their hesitance or reluctance with not caring or being uncommitted.

While that may have been true in some instances, sometimes people just want to keep certain parts of their life separated. People also may not see in themselves what you see in them; that takes time. You cannot change their minds and the more you push toward it, the more you can push them away. If you're patient and keep looking, other talented people will emerge and gladly help in those areas.

Gauge everyone's commitment level. One thing I enjoy doing with clients is providing them with experiences that are fun and insightful. Here's an example: The next time you have your team together, bring up the topic of breakfast. Ask them, "Hey, when it comes to breakfast, which animal would you rather be? The chicken or the pig?"

Don't answer any "Why?" or "What do you mean?" responses. Just keep asking them the same question until everyone answers. When all of your team members have given a response, tell them, "Well, the chicken made a *contribution*, because it gave some eggs. But the



Some of our Black Belt Team members.



Trying to bring more of the "art" in martial arts with our black belt class.

pig – oh, the pig – definitely made a 100% *commitment* to breakfast."

In the same fashion, a black belt team should understand and know every member's level of contribution and commitment to growing and maintaining a successful school. Everyone can contribute and be committed, but that does *not* mean it will look the same for every team member. How many times have we seen people move up in our schools and then go through life changes that required us to adjust?



This happens regularly, because our greatest job is to make sure that every time a person comes through our doors, he or she leaves just a little better than when they entered.

My amazing wife, Kimberly, is an interior designer and she taught me about the principle of “sustainability” by describing it in one question: “Did you leave it better than you found it?”

For school owners and team members, I ask you, “Are we leaving people better than when they found us?” If you keep this idea in mind when you’re looking at people’s commitments, trust me. They will be loyal and support the school for many years.

A Black Belt Is Supposed to Stand for Something

For the 23 years that I’ve been training in martial arts, I always believed that having a black belt signified something special. For me, the black belt represents growth, a focus on character and a rudimentary level of mastering the basics.

In my business, I’ve learned that getting people to work effectively together – and understand what is required and needed of each other – is akin to herding angry, hungry cats! It’s not an easy task and, often, quite stressful. But I believe in my instructor, friend and mentor, Hanshi Torey Overstreet, TNT Jujitsu’s owner, when he wisely tells us, “If you can successfully operate in chaos, *you can do anything.*”

My martial arts life reflected my personal life, in that it was non-linear, disorganized and filled with heartaches and hard times. One of my biggest motivations for the work I do simply comes from my upbringing. The neighborhood I grew up in was drug-infested and violent. The number of people I personally know that are dead, serving long prison sentences or permanently damaged from drugs and related crimes is appalling.

I grew up seeing the effects of selfishness, non-communication and a focus on personal gain. Just as it ruined my old neighborhood, that same negativity continues to hurt teams, families and communities alike.

One thing that guides our TNT Jujitsu community is something we call 1-7-12. For us, this stands for our one dojo creed, our seven tenets of jujitsu and the 12 jujitsu principles. Many traditional schools have similar ideas and statements such as respect, honor and integrity.

We make it a point to discuss and live our philosophy with all members of our community. Had it not been for Hanshi Overstreet and my community/family at TNT Jujitsu, I know that I probably would have not earned my doctorate degree. And also, in many ways made it through some very difficult, personal struggles.

Please know that I am not trying to preach or lecture to anyone. Allow me to share a very personal story that illustrates the value of



Working with some of our Lil Dragons

excellent teams and leadership.

My dad fell into a coma in April 2016 and eventually passed a month later. My mom is Vietnamese and, even after 45 years in the U.S., her accent is still thick and her understanding of English can vary.

Now, imagine a team of doctors trying to explain medical procedures and directives to someone with limited English proficiency that is grieving and scared. The medical team and administration always made sure to communicate everything to my mom with a translator. They were patient with her and us and, most importantly, they were compassionate while still focusing on giving my dad the best care.

While none of this brought him back, it did make the month-long process of his passing easier for the family to bear. That focus on doing a great job and delivering the best quality of service is what our clients expect of us and what we should absolutely demand of ourselves.

As I close, I simply ask that you consider the following questions. Ask them of yourself and your teammates:

“What does that black belt mean to you?”

“Which standards should a black belt follow?”

“Do you feel that I am living up to those standards? How about your teammates and, last, yourself?”

Remember, just as the man chose to eat unhealthy foods and the diner owner decided to put those dishes on the menu, happiness/success is a choice. And all of our choices do indeed affect everyone around us. So, please choose wisely, my friends, and continue to

Find Your Inner Black Belt®.

✉ Dr. Nguyen “Tom” Griggs works with organizations to develop black belt leaders that others want to follow. He specializes in the areas of Teams, Leadership and Conflict Resolution. His company, Lead Connect Grow LLC, is based in Houston, TX. He can be reached at tom@ntgriggs.com.

Through the newly-enhanced MAIA website, you can access nearly any piece of information, from A to Z, about what you want to help grow your school. You can search by month or by keyword to find exactly what you need. Visit www.maiahub.com to find other great features available only online. 🏆



Nguyen “Tom” Griggs

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