

Tom O.

According to Wikipedia Sensei is a Japanese Title used to refer to or address teachers, professors, professionals such as lawyers, doctors, politicians, clergymen, and other figures of authority. The word is also used to show respect to someone who has achieved a certain level of mastery in an art form or some other skill. Another translation I've heard is that a Sensei is "one who comes before", perhaps to imply more experience, knowledge or rank. So in Japanese Shotokan Karate what makes a good Sensei, and, what am I doing to one day become a Sensei?

To me a good Sensei is one who listens, and observes as well as instructs. They are a keeper of tradition, and need to be an innovator in helping to keep the art alive. They themselves are both a teacher and a student, humble and approachable, yet confident and silently commanding a certain level of respect not only for their karate skills but other life accomplishments. Training with a good Sensei is far different than spending time with one who is just going through the motions or doing it for their self. With a good Sensei you walk out of the class not only feeling like you've had a good workout, but knowing you've learned something new, or better understand something you thought you already knew, and, that your already looking forward to the next class.

This is not to say that a good training session rests solely on the shoulders of the Sensei. Each student is responsible for bringing certain elements to the class such as energy, focus, drive and a desire to learn new skills and improve on existing ones, not

only for themselves but for the class as well. A good Sensei supplies their part too; they start with an outline or plan for the session, one that builds on recent classes, and if the students are ready they introduce new techniques. A good Sensei also needs to be flexible, able to adjust to the needs of the class in order to help promote the maximum transfer of knowledge and build on the student's skills.

I believe that at some point, after learning the outline of the basic techniques, the serious karateka begins thinking beyond their own individual training, and starts observing others. Not just watching their technique, but actually providing appropriate timely constructive comments and support to their peers and lower ranks. Hence preparing themselves to one day become a Sensei. The prospective Sensei ("Sensei in training") not only continues to improve their own skills both in and out of class, through training, reflection and reading, they become a support to the Sensei and Senpai. Paying ever-closer attention to the techniques and way of karate, and, to the good teaching techniques of those before them (my Sensei).