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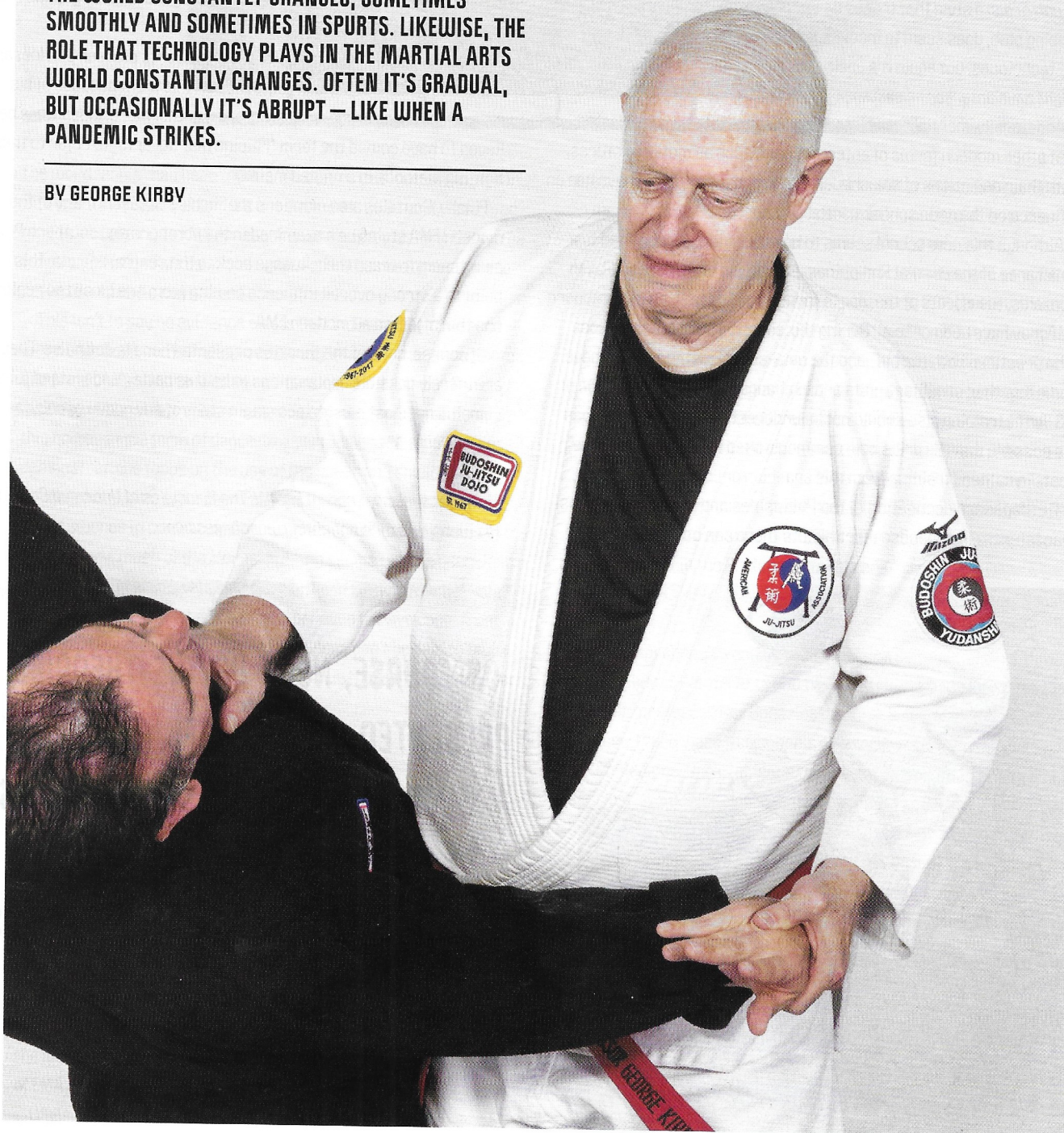


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YOU'VE MASTERED ZOOM CLASSES — ARE YOU READY TO HOST A ZOOM WORKSHOP?

THE WORLD CONSTANTLY CHANGES, SOMETIMES SMOOTHLY AND SOMETIMES IN SPURTS. LIKEWISE, THE ROLE THAT TECHNOLOGY PLAYS IN THE MARTIAL ARTS WORLD CONSTANTLY CHANGES. OFTEN IT'S GRADUAL, BUT OCCASIONALLY IT'S ABRUPT — LIKE WHEN A PANDEMIC STRIKES.

BY GEORGE KIRBY



I'm fairly familiar with technology — I've used it since the late 1980s to enhance and expand my instructional programs — and it's served me well. However, like most other martial artists, I've been challenged by COVID-19. And like most other instructors, I've found myself wondering, *What do I do now? How do I keep my students? Can technology help?*

The most popular answer to that question has been to use Zoom or a comparable video-conferencing platform to deliver instruction to students who either elect or are required to stay at home. Because many of you have been doing this for nearly a year, I won't delve into the subject. Instead, I'll discuss a topic that's closely related.

Senior sensei around the world devote significant portions of their professional lives to teaching other sensei the finer points of their arts. I count myself among them in that I regularly hold give-and-take workshops attended by instructors, some of whom teach my art and some of whom teach other styles.

These workshops tend to have a different format than Zoom classes that are aimed at students. The goal in a workshop is certainly to communicate technical details, but it's also about providing guidance on how to teach those details, as well as about being inclusive and encouraging while reducing the feelings of isolation we all seem to be suffering these days. After all, if instructors don't feel good about their profession, their students won't feel good about their lessons.

I've found that the optimal group size for such workshops is six to 12. This number allows participants to feel involved and to get to know each other better while keeping the sessions informal and conducive to the open expression of ideas. This last point is particularly important when you're dealing with teachers of other arts who don't have the same technical background you have.

In any workshop, it's essential to meet the needs of the participants, most of whom will be instructors who wish to learn how to teach your techniques the right way. I always tell myself that if I can help them solve their

problems and answer their questions, they'll be able to do a better job teaching their students, and that benefits the entire martial arts community.

One of the best ways to encourage workshop participants to seek help solving their problems is to ask them to suggest topics they wish to discuss before the session begins. Then you can address those points and provide solutions to the whole group, under the assumption that other attendees are likely to be wondering about the same things.

Most of the time, you, as the organizer, will be able to address each point that's brought up. Occasionally, an attendee will have more experience in a specific area, in which case that person should be deferred to. As I said, the atmosphere should be one of give and take.

With the potential for differences among attendees, you should remember that the strength of this kind of workshop hinges on respect.

Assuming you'd like to start holding online workshops, you'll need to determine how often and for how long. Remember that instructors lead busy lives. Few of us live in the *dojo* 24/7. Your workshops will have to fit into their schedules.

That realization is why I typically schedule just two workshops a month, usually on Saturday mornings. Mine are about an hour in duration — although some have gone as long as 95 minutes, usually when a topic resonates with the participants.

Speaking of topics, it's not unusual for a pre-planned topic to segue into an unanticipated topic. As the person in charge, you'll need to decide either to allow this to happen, assuming there's interest among the participants, or to steer the workshop back on track.

As a side note, know that going with the flow can be an asset because it shows participants that you're flexible. If such a diversion causes your allotted time to run out, you have

the option to cover the material you didn't get to in your next workshop. The key is to meet the needs of the participants, not necessarily to stick to the preplanned schedule. (Try not to interpret a change in direction as a poor reflection on you. It's not.)

The final factor to consider is who will be allowed to participate. Do you want to limit attendance to just members of your dojo or its parent organization, or will you allow participants from any art or school? Do they have to be paying members of your organization, or can people attend for free?

It all comes down to what kind of workshop atmosphere you wish to foster. As I noted earlier, I normally have six to 12 participants. About half of them come from different *ryu* or arts. A few are senior students of mine, and a few are not even members of my organization. And that's OK. Different martial arts backgrounds can spark discussions on different approaches and lead participants to find commonalities.

That said, with the potential for differences among attendees, you should remember that the strength of this kind of workshop hinges on respect. Sometimes participants can be very frank; that's fine, but it needs to be done within a bubble of mutual respect and courtesy. This is the key to maintaining a give-and-take atmosphere.

Clearly, hosting a workshop requires planning, flexibility and the willingness to manage people who occasionally need to be reminded to be polite. However, if your goal is to expand understanding of your art and help instructors resolve issues within this framework, it's worth the investment of time and energy.

The ride won't always be smooth, but it will be memorable, and that's what you want because positive memories of your workshop are what will draw people back to your next event. 🙏

George Kirby, 10th degree, is a Black Belt Hall of Famer and the founder of Budoshin Jujitsu. His most recent book is Jujitsu: Toward One Technique. For more information, visit shopblackbeltmag.com.