

One-on-One: UP Clients UP close and personal

Adam Churchwell from Columbus, Georgia:

UP: Hello Mr. Churchwell, thank you for taking the time to talk with us and share information with other school owners and instructors.

Adam: My pleasure. I will always take time for UP and share with my fellow school owners.

UP: Just to get some background on you and your school we know you are located in Columbus Ga, population of about 185,000. What size is your facility?

Adam: We just built and moved into a 10,000 sq/ft building.

UP: You Built?

Adam: Yes. We decided our lease/rent at our old place was high and we could build and own our own place for about the same cost. So we built a facility that rocks, and is awesome so people want to be here.

UP: That's Awesome. So what is your active count as of this month?

Adam: Our afterschool side or Karate Side? Karate is a little over 300 active - more are signed up but that is what comes through each week. Our afterschool is almost at max with 50 we wanted 60, but haven't reached that yet but we are still working on it and we will get them.

UP: What style of martial arts is your base?

Adam: I started in TKD (Tae Kwon Do) in November of 1986 and the age of 12. This was old school martial arts. I got my Black Belt in 1992 and that is when my instructor came to me and said "you teach now", and it wasn't a question. So in 1992 I started teaching my first Karate class.

UP: Sounds like how I got started but my story has one of those weird twists to it, we can talk about that later. So you started teaching in "92" at the age of 18. When did you decide to be a school owner or that you wanted your own school?

Adam: That came in 1997. I was just out of college and married for about a year. I said to Jennifer, my wife, (who was a teacher at the time) that I wanted to open my own school. So as a family, we did. I was also an elementary teacher and kept teaching for the next 8 years. I taught 3rd and 4th grade over those 8 years and was getting really burned out doing both.

UP: When did you decide to start teaching full time?

Adam: My wife and I were getting very frustrated. Working full time jobs every day and with me at the school every night, it was hard. We decided we had to do something. So I

went to UP about 3 years ago. It was in July, I forget who invited me, but that is when I joined UP.

UP: What was your active count when you joined UP?

Adam: We were in the low hundreds. But the biggest obstacle or challenge was we had no business systems in place. We were just trudging along. I think that is what frustrated us the most. So when I was at the UP event I started asking questions and started seeing what other schools were doing to keep things easy and simple. So when I got back home I emailed Mr. Silva and told him I was frustrated and what could I do to take my school to the next level and just do it full time. He told me first thing I needed to do was go visit a fellow martial arts school owner close to him, Steve Baxley, in Dothan Alabama. He said "Talk to him see what he is doing and the systems he has in place". So after my visit with Steve, I was blown away with the systems he had and how simple it made things, making life so easy. So when I got back to the school I told Mr. Silva I was going to join PMA and go at it full force. So we have been PMA ever since. It is the systems UP has that makes life so easy from our hours to marketing to just making things fun.

UP: That is a great testimonial for systems and the importance of systems. We have seen steady growth in your school each year. Besides putting all the systems in place and having someone in your Corner. What would you say are your top 5 other reasons for your growth?

Adam:

1. Professionalism! We keep everything on a professional level. From communicating with staff, to students, to our parents. We had a guy come in, he was visiting from another school in the area, he was asking about us and was amazed. He said, "Wow, the place I'm at doesn't even have a set schedule."
2. Cleanliness! Keeping our school clean, smelling good and looking good is important. Keeping a clean environment tells our clients we care.
3. Curriculum that is fun and exciting and constantly building on itself.
4. Having events, making our school family oriented. We host Parent Nights Out almost every month giving our parents a safe and exciting place to bring their children so they can relax and have an evening out without worrying about them.
5. Being involved in our community. We want to be known throughout our area as a business that is involved and cares. We host booths at events all over town, hold charity fundraisers, donate time, and just get involved.

UP: Can you share with us your top three marketing strategies?

Adam:

1. We get in the school systems. That is important to us and with me being a former teacher I have a little "in" with most of the schools around here. We make sure it is all about them and not about us. We want them to want us there, not just be there to market and try to use them to build our school.
2. These may sound simple, but we wrapped our vehicles. I have my car wrapped and we have all our After School Karate vans wrapped. We get at least 1 call a day from someone saying "I saw your car driving down the road tell me about"
3. Having a great website. We get over 3 hits a week just from our website. And you have to make sure it is a good one with a good link line so no matter what they type in, your school gets hit.

UP: You were mentioning your ASK program. How many staff do you have to run that, for that matter, how many staff do you have all together?

Adam: We have 2 full time instructors, 1 full time manager, 1 full time front desk person, and 4 part time after school teachers.

UP: How do you pick your employees? What is it that you are looking for in a good employee?

Adam: All my staff came from within my school. They are people that have been with me since they were white belts. What we look for in our staff is loyalty, someone we can trust that will be there for us, and follow our way of thinking and teaching. Or staff has passion for what we do here. They want the same thing for our students as we do and of course personality. They have to have a great personality and be willing to put their own needs and wants aside and put the student first.

UP: How important is their training? Do you send your staff to UP events? Do you see an advantage to that over in-house training?

Adam: Although in-house train is important, and should be done on a regular cycle, going to outside training is paramount. We try to go to every event we can. This gives us a different perspective. We get to see what someone else does and how they would react to the same scenario you have seen. Going to the events helps motivate us, giving us more fire when we come back. Being around other people with the like attitudes and desires would help anyone.

UP: With all the talk in the media, everyday, about how bad the economy is, what is your opinion to fellow school owners?

Adam: Ha, I would have to say don't panic, don't fall into "the sky is falling" mindset. Sure things are a little tight, but we have to keep doing what we are supposed to do to keep our business going. You have to keep your marketing going. You can't stop that and you have to be task oriented. I try to keep my eye on my goal. Each month we establish our goals and that is what we focus on. I know it is easy to get discouraged, but we have to keep doing what we know needs to be done and not let it get to us.

UP: I know you have a very successful business and you work hard at it, but you can't work all the time. What do you do to keep perspective, to keep yourself from getting the "Burned out syndrome"?

Adam: (laugh) Well I make myself remember who I am doing this for, my family. So I make time for them. I make sure I do family things, we go bowling, swimming, anything I do on my free days I make sure it is something I can do with my family. I make sure that I take days off each week even during the week to spend time with them, and I remember "Family Comes First".

UP: Just curious what is next for you? New school, New home, New Car, How about a long deserved vacation?

Adam: Well, to be honest we have our new school and we don't really need those others. But what we are doing and a thing I feel is very important, especially for a Martial Arts school owner. We are saving for retirement. We are structuring retirement accounts so that we won't have to work forever. Everyone should have a financial advisor. Someone helping them to prepare for that day that comes to everyone, the day you retire or can't work.

UP: Great advice, that is one of the reasons UP has financial advisers now attend all our events and host seminars on just that. One final thing, can you leave us with some parting words of wisdom?

Adam: Ha, I don't know about wisdom, but here is what I think. Running a business isn't easy, it is downright hard. You have to be task oriented and have systems in place, have someone in your Corner. I read this from Bill Storm the other day and he was quoting Zig Ziglar. I will just paraphrase, "Make your Goal to help as many other people get what they want and you will get what you want." God will take care of you.

UP: Wow, good words of wisdom. I think they say a lot. I want to thank you for taking this time to talk with us and share your views thoughts and a little of your personal life with us. Good luck, and talk to you soon.