

Aikido in Business

Since Aiki Extensions turned its attentions to the UK about 2 and half years ago, I have been a supporter, mainly because I have always felt that really it was how we practised off the mat that was more important than our activities on it. After all most of us only get to spend but a few short hours a week on the mat. Our practice just provides an excellent way of demonstrating the philosophy in a dramatic and powerful way. So when Aiki Extensions in the shape of Mark Walsh came a calling, it was great to know that I was not a lone voice in the wilderness.

I was given a slot in the first two UK events to really say my piece and so I was delighted to be given an opportunity to do so again, when the third, (and biggest and best), event took place in February this year.

I was slightly taken aback though when Mark suggested that my topic would be aikido in business. Sure, I run my own small business, and I dare say it is reasonably successful, but I am not a specialist speaker on this subject and I do not train people on it, though I am thinking of adding this to my repertoire. However, upon reflection, I figured that given that the whole credo for the association I belong to and helped found called 'Aikido for Daily Life' was very much about taking the principles of aikido off the mat and applying them in daily life, that I should go ahead, as much of my own daily life is spent in the business arena.

That left me with the simple problem of putting something together, so I didn't look a complete idiot on the day. Firstly I sat down and looked at the things that aikido helps to develop. I found it to be a long list and all useful if applied in the business arena, and for that matter anywhere else. So here's what I came up with and I am sure that the list is far from exhaustive:

- It develops a positive attitude to life.
- It teaches us patience.
- We learn to be sensitive, (to what is going on within ourselves and within others).
- It helps us to fulfil our potential.
- It teaches us discipline.
- It teaches us to pay attention to the detail.
- We learn to respect everyone else's perspective.
- It teaches us the value of commitment and hard work.
- We learn to work harmoniously with others in just about the most dramatic way possible. (*Being attacked with a big wooden stick is probably a much bigger problem than most of us face in our daily lives*).
- We learn that mostly motivation to move forward comes from within, though a little help from our friends can be helpful.
- We learn that practice, if it doesn't exactly make perfect, goes a long way toward s improvement.
- As a teacher, and my view is that every student of aikido is in some way a teacher, we develop our communication skills. We need to be able to explain a principle or technique in ways that mean something to every individual on the mat.
- We learn that fighting and one-upmanship ultimately get us no where.
- We learn tolerance.

- We discover that curiosity, or should I say an enquiring mind, brings rich rewards.
- Perhaps best of all, as we grow and become more understanding of the way in which the world works we develop a strong sense of humility and empathy for others.

If that isn't enough, most students of aikido enjoy better health than their peers and very often they look younger too. So it's quite a long list of positives, but then that is exactly what aikido is about. I do not think that it takes a genius to see how all these traits and benefits can only help us achieve our goals in the business world or anywhere else for that matter.

I was pleased with my list, but wasn't really sure how I was going to start my potential career as a trainer, based on a long list of attributes that I believe aikido helps to develop. So I turned to the principles of aikido as taught by Tohei Sensei, which were the foundation for my own training on the mat. In short these go something like:

1. Extend your mind.
2. Know your partner's mind.
3. Respect your partner's ki.
4. Put yourself in your partner's place.
5. Perform with confidence.

With some appropriate training on the mat this all works very well, but to the average Joe, frankly is about as helpful as the a manual you get with your latest electrical gadget. I had realised this some time ago and had wanted my students to be aware that the principles at play here were more significant than perhaps they realised and could be applied as principles in the practise of daily life. As a result I set about providing a bit of translation and this is what I came up with.

1. Be positive, (*A positive mind is an outward looking mind and when you look out you have a much better chance of achieving step two*).
2. Try to understand exactly where the people you have to deal with are coming from. (*Understanding helps us to start moving to a position where we can begin to deal with the problem*).
3. Respect their views and actions even if you disagree with them. (*We can not agree with everyone all the time, but everyone has a reason for thinking what they think, and a healthy respect brings understanding and an ability to accept difference or if you are lucky the chance to show someone an alternative way*).
4. Place yourself in the position of the person you are interacting with. (*When you truly step into someone else's shoes you have a good chance of working out what it is they need and want from you, and thereby coming up with an appropriate solution*).
5. Then act with confidence. (*You have given yourself the best chance of taking the most appropriate course of action, so you might as well give it your best shot*).

It's a pretty simple philosophy and one that works in business as well as anywhere else. Does it mean that you will avoid mistakes and succeed all the time? Of course not!!!! But being aware of it is the key. The more you practice it, the better you get and just like on the mat, the journey is where the fun is to be had, not necessarily the destination itself.

So if you are looking for a trainer and want to start me in my new career, I am open to offers, especially if you are based somewhere sunny and abroad!

Quentin Cooke

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