

Aikido: A Compulsory Subject for Leaders

What must leaders be able to do, today, and even more tomorrow? The answers sound very alike, no matter whether you ask professors, leaders themselves, entrepreneurs, or anybody else. Among other things (I will write about these other things some other time...) the following things are stated frequently: keep track in dynamic environments; maintaining your own balance; react properly to challenges; deal with resistance; use your resources efficiently and effectively; create maximum impact; seize opportunities with determination; make clear decisions; solve conflicts; and, yes: lead – of course.

Funnily enough there seems to be a widespread assumption that this has to be combined with a martial frown, finger-wagging, a grim facial expression, maximum effort, and steely hardness. This is as exhausting as it is futile, and thus rubbish.

Aikido offers the possibility to foster all the above-mentioned capabilities in a more efficient way, by transfer through bodily, movement learning, known to be the most sustainable and effective learning path (your body will never forget how to drive a car, once you have learned it).

The bad news is: it takes years to learn Aikido in its full scope – but then again this is not very different with leading...the good news is: the basic principles can be taught in a short time, and offer by themselves plenty of lessons that are very useful for leaders. Among these principles are:

„Don't pull, don't push“ – but still determine the way things go. Have you ever tried to drag your employees or a complex system in a given direction? If you ask them, employees report that this happens quite often, with the result that I just mentioned: it's exhausting and futile.

„Don't hesitate“: There are opportunities that appear only in very small time slots that you must seize – which very often leads people to live in constant tightness because they expect that they might have to jump at a chance every second: very exhausting and futile...the opposite is much more helpful for seizing opportunities.

„Never work against your partner“: in most cases direct confrontation and fight will lead to hardened situations: there is no movement whatsoever, although everybody is struggling hard. Aikido propagates cooperation instead of fight, and the difference is fulminant. This same difference is addressed by the well known saying that is used in the field of mindfulness: „you can't stop the wave – but you can learn to surf“. Many people behave as if they could stop the wave. You get very high odds for that from the bookies, but based on my own experience (both as a surfer and as a leader) I would not advise you to try. Your chances are better playing the lottery.

Last but not least there is the tale of the disciple asking his master: „How long will it take for me to reach mastership?“ And the master says: „ten years.“ The disciple exclaims in despair: „That's much too long. How about it if I work twice as hard as everybody else and if I push myself even more?“ And the master says: „Twenty years.“

Aikido is not the miracle cure as there is no such thing. But it does offer a way of adding to the insights you already have. Being relaxed and effective? Yes, you can. I speak from my own experience.