

Praise for Business Aikido

"Business Aikido offers a fresh and original perspective on collaboration and leadership. It's about creating together and staying close together, based on classical principles, applied in everyday practice. An instructive guide for managers and employees with practical examples that everyone can put to work immediately."

Hans Leijtens

Former Royal Military Police commander, NATO board member

"Many books have already been written about aikido, yet this book is a welcome addition: it is the first book that concisely explains how to apply aikido in your daily life and work. Clear, concise, and practical - a pleasure to read. It will help you (and your team) make different choices and rise above yourself. A must-read for every professional and leader!"

Daan Fousert

Director of Servant Leadership Solutions

"An enrichment for inside, but especially outside the aikido world.

A practical manual for SMEs, with its very own, highly accessible style and direct applicability. Absolutely recommended!"

Bjørn Aris

Former investment banker, global management trainer, sword master

"Peter has succeeded extremely well in committing his passion and insights to paper. A balanced combination of theory, examples and exercises - this book challenges the reader to connect more, not only between head, heart and body, but precisely also with the other."

Harry Bosma

Director and supervisory board member in healthcare

A disciple said to his master, "You teach me to fight, but you talk about peace. How do you reconcile the two?"

The master replied, "It is better to be a warrior in a garden, than a gardener in a war."

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"The art of peace (aikido) is the absence of resistance. Because it offers no resistance, it has already won in advance. People with evil intentions or controversial thoughts are immediately defeated. The art of peace is invincible because it competes with nothing.

A warrior's ultimate challenge is to turn the enemy's terrifying wrath into an innocent smile."

*Morihei Ueshiba
Founder of aikido*

Introduction

Martial arts and business

When the West meets the East, there is a world to discover. This book is about the encounter between Western business and organizational life and the Japanese martial and peace art aikido. This art, known as "the way of harmony," originated in the middle of the last century and is practiced around the world today. This book shows how aikido principles can help you grow beyond yourself as a professional - but also as a team or organization. More than about personal growth, leadership development or effective collaboration in organizations, this book is about how you approach life, what the consequences are for yourself and how you can influence this, simply by making different choices. The key to this lies closer to you than you might think: within yourself. Aikido serves as a mirror and metaphor.

For any professional, looking at your own reality from a completely different angle every now and then is highly enlightening. It allows you to see an aspect of your own actions which you are not normally aware of. The perspective of aikido is interesting for four reasons:

1. Different perspective, same principles: When it comes to human interaction, the cooperation between two business people naturally looks completely different from the cooperation between two aikidoka (aikido students) on the mat. But underneath, exactly the same principles are at work. For example, if you put pressure on someone, you create resistance. If you are too careful, others will take up the space you leave open. If you resist, you are vulnerable and easy prey for others. Once you understand how these principles work, you can make them work for you in all areas of your life. Valuable and liberating.

- 2.

Experiencing yourself, physically and in the moment. You can only learn a martial art by doing, with another person, and in motion. Not only with your head, but with your whole being. With surprisingly simple exercises you can discover how you unconsciously lose your balance in everyday situations, but also how you can consciously regain your balance in the same situations. Experiencing first-hand how powerful and big the difference is between the

two situations is a fundamental eye-opener for many people. You get feedback from your own body, right in the moment. You can get started right away.

3.

One's own strength as the starting point: The starting point in aikido is always: what can I do in this situation? You cannot think of yourself as a victim. Even in a situation where an aikidoka loses, it is not a failure but a learning moment. From an organizational point of view, this is interesting because it shapes an attitude in which individuals take responsibility for their own actions and results, instead of looking for the causes outside themselves. But it also works for you as an individual: daring to stand up for who you are and what you do is enriching and actually enjoyable.

4.

A suitable metaphor: We "fight" each other every day. We waste a lot of energy, time and therefore money. Fortunately, we do not fight physically, but in our attitude and behavior. We are competitive and readily see the other as an opponent. And that is how we approach each other: we want to conquer market share, beat our competitors, win tenders, etc. and take over companies to dominate or at least survive in the markets we operate in. But we also compete for power, position and influence within the organization. During meetings we fight over opinions and in the event of a reorganization we dive into our trenches, ready to fiercely defend our position. This is precisely what makes the martial arts perspective so interesting. It shows how, instead of fighting each other, you can easily stop fighting to make room for real cooperation, with mutual consideration. Aikido is different from other martial arts and is an interesting subject of study for business and organizational life. This has to do with the origin of this art, about which a short story can be told.

The path of harmony (story)

Morihei Ueshiba (1883-1969), the founder of aikido, was often sickly as a child and - even for a Japanese - of small stature. Instead of trying to improve his own physique to compensate for this disadvantage against physically stronger opponents, he decided to focus on all those aspects of a fight where muscle strength and mass are not decisive and sometimes even detrimental.

For example, his timing, his distance in relation to the opponent, always operating from the center of the movement and being able to remain completely relaxed under pressure. In all these aspects he was exceptionally skilled, always outpacing or outsmarting his attackers. It made Ueshiba a legendary figure in the world of martial arts and far beyond. What made him immortal, however, was the intention with which he faced his opponents. According to lore, Ueshiba experienced a moment of spiritual enlightenment around 1925. At that moment, he understood that the energy with which he approached others was exactly the same energy that he received back from them. If he approached his opponents with the intention of eliminating them, they would try to do the same to him. If he offered them help instead, the attack would resolve itself. From then on, he decided to focus all his knowledge and skills on promoting peace and harmony in the world. Shortly before his death in April 1969, Ueshiba, who by then was already called “o-sensei” (great teacher), gave his students one last instruction: “Aikido is for the whole world. Do not train for selfish reasons, but for everyone, anywhere in the world.”

Morihei Ueshiba, founder of aikido

Aikido is distinct from other martial arts because aikidoka train with the intention of neutralizing aggression and resolving tension. This is very different from just learning how to fight. The intention is peaceful. So, the focus is not on overcoming the other person but on overcoming yourself. When you practice aikido, you get to know yourself better and better. It is a never-ending path of growth. There are no losers in aikido. You help each other to improve continuously. Instead of developing muscle strength, in aikido you train flexibility, agility and resilience and learn to work according to universal principles. Qualities that are extremely relevant to professionals in business. Exactly how this works is covered in detail later in this book.

For whom and by whom?

With this book, I wish to raise awareness of the great value of aikido principles for business and organizational life. As such, it is primarily intended for leaders, managers, consultants, entrepreneurs, and other professionals. Anyone who is willing to overcome themselves and make a difference for the greater good (team, organization, network, society, world). We spend much of our time at work and derive our status from it. It is a breeding ground for personal and social development. There is a lot of untapped potential in this regard - if you can mobilize this potential in yourself and in others, it can be a lever for real organizational or even societal change. Think of resolving unnecessary strife and promoting mutual understanding in our society. There is a need for this. It has an impact on everything. Also, this book is for anyone who is interested in personal strengths and genuine cooperation, but does not necessarily want to practice a martial art.

Against what background am I writing this book? I believe that you are capable of much more than you realize and that you already have within you everything you need to do so. Learning to connect all your knowledge and skills with the resources at your disposal (head, heart, and body) is the shortest path to living and working as the best version of yourself. This is much more effective than focusing on collecting (even more) new knowledge and information. The key is not outside but rather inside yourself. In my work as a trainer and coach, I bring together over 25 years of experience as an HR professional with over 25 years of practicing Eastern martial arts (judo, karate, aikido and systema). My belief in human ability is based on

years of working with professionals in very different organizations, from all kinds of disciplines and at all levels. Over the years, I have interviewed more than 3,000 of them about their ambitions, motivations, and talents. But also, about what demotivated them, frustrated them and made them leave an organization and work elsewhere. For over ten years, I was part of management teams as a result of which I was closely involved in major reorganizations. This has given me a good understanding of organizational dynamics: from the shop floor to the boardroom.

As my professional career developed in parallel with my aikido career, bridges between these seemingly completely different worlds emerged quite naturally. I discovered that, except for the form, there are really no differences in terms of principles. On the basis of this observation, I began to focus more and more on translating aikido principles into practical value for companies and organizations. I studied various national and international martial arts masters, management thinkers and authors in the fields of personal growth, leadership, organizational and change management. All this comes together in this book on "business aikido."

About this book

The book consists of four parts. Part 1 is a warm-up piece that introduces business aikido and outlines the context. Part 2 is about overcoming yourself. The first step is to learn to recognize your automatic reactions. Secondly, it explains how to relax completely and introduces centering, one of the core principles of aikido. Part 3 is about winning together. Here your intention plays an important role and you read how to increase your scope of action and influence when under pressure. This part concludes with how you can get teams and organizations to function more cohesively and powerfully. Part 4 is about securing the principles in your daily life. Along the way, I make connections to current themes. At the end of the book, you will find some appendices to get you started on your own path.

This book describes a development path that runs from the inside (overcoming yourself) to the outside (winning together). It uses eight aikido principles and explains how they work (for you). These eight principles are derived from the vision of Koichi Tohei, the most advanced student of Morihei Ueshiba and founder of Ki-aikido. He identified just four principles:

maintain your center, relax completely, keep your weight low and keep your attention focused outwards. However, the eight principles in this book offer more concrete guidance for you as a non-aikidoka. I mention them briefly here:

THE 8 AIKIDO PRINCIPLES

1. Accept the situation as it is
2. Be present in the moment
3. Relax completely
4. Do everything from your center
5. Be attentive towards others
6. Keep moving
7. Pursue unity in everything
8. Know what you want to contribute to the big picture

In this book, I illustrate these principles with real-life stories. I also provide some basic exercises that you can use - sometimes alone and sometimes with a partner - to experience the effect of each principle. If an exercise does not work for you, do not be discouraged. Leave it for the moment, read on and possibly do the exercise again later. Each chapter concludes with practical tips and tools to help you deal with everyday situations. I advise you to read this book with an open mind first. Then delve into the theme that appeals to you most. Do this theme by theme. That way you will get the most benefit while maintaining a proper balance between overview and depth.

Sometimes a teacher, always a student. I have been practicing martial arts for 30 years, aikido for 20 of them. There are people who have been practicing aikido for much longer, so modesty is in order. This does not stop me from sharing what I have learned so far and making connections to our western work environment. This combination is where my expertise lies.

Although this is not a scientific book, it contains valuable insights that I have gathered through years of training, thousands of repetitions of techniques, and the constant discovery of new, deeper layers. But also, through working with several great international masters who share their knowledge and wisdom wholeheartedly in seminars. Especially by being allowed to experience it for myself, because for some kinds of wisdom, that works much

better than talking about it. This is how I gathered and processed a lot of knowledge. And although I still do not understand everything either, I know it works!

I cordially invite you to complement my work where necessary, to ask questions or start a dialogue so that we can learn from and with each other. To share is to multiply.

Finally, I have chosen to use fictitious names in the practical examples. Not only because of confidentiality, but mainly because the examples concern us all and are recognizable to everyone. Exceptions are my personal experiences, such as my first encounter with a Japanese master. This encounter was something special, as I soon realized:

After I had practiced the art of aikido for several months, my teacher at the time invited a Japanese master to give a seminar in the Netherlands. It was Morito Suganuma, one of the last resident students of Morihei Ueshiba. During the seminar, this little master, who was much lighter and over 20 years older than me, demonstrated how he threw big guys effortlessly across the mat. At one point, he asked me to come forward for a demonstration: a so-called kokyū ho (a breath throw). I took a seat opposite him, grabbed his wrists at his invitation and tried to push him over. Since I was used to this from my years of karate experience, I did it with force. I got a shock - it felt like I was up against a concrete wall! While I doggedly tried to get him off his seat, I looked up at him. To my surprise, he had a friendly and relaxed face. It obviously took no effort on his part. Suddenly he made an abrupt movement and the next moment I was with my back on the mat.

Kindly, he invited me to try again. Gratefully, I accepted his invitation. Although I now applied even more force, it was again hopeless. I did not understand any of it. It was illogical and contradicted everything I had learned up to that point. I needed to expand my frame of mind. With a single exercise, Suganuma had opened up a new world to me that I did not know existed.

Now, after years of training with various masters and great masters and with countless other aikidoka, I understand that Morito Suganuma had already decided the fight before it began, precisely by not engaging in the fight at all.

Respectfully, he let me fall into my own trap and taught me that there is a difference between using force and being powerful. At the end of the seminar, he created for me the calligraphy on the next page, which represents "balance."