

# Aikido

and

## **The Art of Resolving Conflict With an Abusive Individual**

**By Hugh Young**

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The purpose of this essay is to give you a practical understanding of how to ethically and effectively resolve conflicts with abusive individuals. Abuse is a common behavior, and because of this, knowing how to resolve these conflicts is an extremely valuable life skill. Of course this is not an easy task. Abusers have developed effective strategies for getting what they want, have often used these strategies for a long time, and are well practiced in how to implement them.

One of the characteristics of the abuser's unique psychological profile is his compelling drive to win. Abusers perceive the world to be a competitive place, and because of this they see their targets as competitors. The abuser's strategy is to get others to play the abuse "game" by his rules. Trying to beat an abuser at his own game is usually neither wise nor effective.

The best way to prevent or handle abuse is to change the nature of the relationship. This is where training in the extraordinary martial art known as Aikido is useful. Aikido is based on a profound philosophy of conflict resolution that takes an enlightened approach to abuse prevention. Unlike most martial arts, Aikido is not competitive, and therefore does not seek to "win" by beating an opponent. Instead, the Aikidoka (Aikido practitioner) learns to transform the relationship with the abuser from that of abuser and his victim, to that of a relationship between equals.

To tell you how Aikido does this, I would like to start with a story from the Zen mythology of Japan. The story will provide a valuable reference for approaching our subject. The tale is of an ethical man who must resolve a conflict with an unprincipled bully.

### **The Tea Master and The Bully Samurai**

There once was a master of the tea ceremony, who was challenged to a sword duel by a mean spirited Samurai. This Bully Samurai hoped to make a name for himself as a skilled fighter by winning some sword matches.

The Tea Master, a member of the Samurai class himself, accepted the challenge as it was his duty to do, least he lose face and bring disgrace to his family and clan. The problem that the Tea Master faced was that he had woefully neglected his study of the ways of the sword, and would surely be easily killed in the match.

Although it was the duty of every Samurai to be skilled in the arts of war, the Tea Master lived at a time of peace. Having little need and no innate interest in the martial arts, he instead had a profound interest in Zen, and particularly Chado, the Way of Tea. While the other boys during his youth were engaged in martial arts practice, the Tea Master could be found at the Zendo (meditation hall) studying Zen, meditating, and pursuing his love of Chado. Through his passion and hard work, he was fortunate to earn the honor of studying with some of the finest teachers of the time.

His single-minded attention to Zen and Tea had led to his attaining high recognition for his abilities. It was this recognition that led to the challenge by the Bully Samurai. The Bully Samurai was hoping to increase his status by beating an opponent of much higher rank. In this case he figured he could do so with little risk to himself. So he made up a petty complaint, pretended to be outraged at the slight, and stated he would settle for no less than blood. The match was set for two days later at a remote field.

The Tea Master, recognizing that he was no match for the Bully Samurai, decided that the only honorable course of action was to learn to die in as dignified a manner as possible. In this way, although he would lose his life, at least he would not bring dishonor to his name, family, or clan.

So he went to the finest sword master in the area, and asked for instruction on how to die in a sword match with dignity. The sword master agreed to instruct the Tea Master, but first requested that the Tea Master prepare tea for him. Recognizing that this would likely be the last time he ever performed his beloved ceremony, the Tea Master poured everything he had into it.

The sword master was astonished with the beauty of the Tea Master's presentation. Every detail was performed with the greatest attention. Most men in his position would be lost in a jumble of anxiety, fear, and anger. Yet, here was a man facing his death with an acceptance and calmness greater than the sword master had witnessed before.

When the ceremony was complete, the sword master told the Tea Master that it was clear that he already knew how to die with dignity. What he needed to do was face the Bully Samurai with the same presence and composure he used to serve tea. All the sword master could possibly add was a few details like how to hold the sword, the proper stance and an appropriate strategy to assume when facing the Bully Samurai.

They met the next morning in the remote field. Just as the sword master had instructed him, the Tea Master went through the ritual of preparation for what he thought would be his last act in this world. The sword master had instructed him to take a "jodan" position with the sword held high and away from his attacker. Here he was to wait until the Bully Samurai came to strike him. At the moment he knew he would be touched by his opponent's sword, he was to summon all his power to counter strike.

The Tea Master carried out these instructions to perfection. The Bully Samurai immediately sensed that something was wrong, but covered his concern by exclaiming that it concerned him little that the Tea Master obviously knew more than he was letting on. He went on to falsely claim that he had beaten many others on the field of battle and this would be no different.

The Bully Samurai began to circle the Tea Master looking for a weakness or opening that he might exploit, but try as he might he could find none. He saw that any attempt he made to strike the Tea Master would lead to "aiuchi," mutual kill. Beads of perspiration began to form on his troubled brow, yet whatever he did the Tea Master held his position with unrelenting calm and presence.

This filled the Bully Samurai with anger and fear. He was the one who now recognized that he was completely out matched. He lowered his sword and begged the Tea Master's forgiveness, which was given after getting a promise to behave better in the future.

This story is popular with Zen practitioners because it shows the power of Zen training. The Tea Master was able to face the Bully Samurai with fearless calm and resolve because through his intensive study he had made peace with death. This peak state of consciousness is a very powerful

accomplishment, one that all martial artists strive for. Without it, the Tea Master would have been powerless against the Bully Samurai. Still, from a conflict resolution perspective, this is not the highest level of attainment.

For all his mastery, the Tea Master was out of touch with the reality of the world he lived in. Abuse is common behavior. Everyone is touched by abuse either directly or indirectly. To not recognize and take steps to address this fact is to court the kind of trouble that the Tea Master experienced. If he better understood abuse he could have taken some easy steps to make himself a less inviting target, and thereby have prevented the whole nasty encounter before it began.

For the Aikidoka (Aikido practitioner), mastery means living life with such power and deep understanding that one never gets drawn into an unwanted conflict like this. This is not because the Aikidoka avoids conflict. To the contrary, Aikido recognizes conflict as a natural, normal, and important part of living a full and productive life. Since it is impossible to avoid conflict, it makes more sense to master it so that it works for you rather than against you. At its most basic level this is the purpose of Aikido.

Aikido is practiced as a role-play scenario of an abusive situation. The typical pattern involves having one or more persons play the role of attacker(s), so the other partner, known as "nage," can learn and develop his Aikido. The person playing the attacker role is known as "uke," which derives from the Japanese word meaning "to receive." This refers to the fact that uke receives the Aikido technique being applied by nage.

Aikido training is a give and take situation where each individual spends half his time being uke and half being nage. Playing the role of uke is not entirely a selfless act, for in the dojo (training studio) it becomes apparent that the best uke are also the best Aikidoka. This is not a coincidence. To learn Aikido it is essential to develop a complete understanding of the art that can only come through learning both roles. Playing the role of an unprincipled abuser is a powerful way to gain an understanding of abuse, which can then be applied in prevention. With this in mind, I will begin by taking a look at abuse and abusers.

### **An Inner Map of the Territory of Abuse**

In the story we see many of the patterns of behavior that are common to abuse. Abuse can be defined as behavior in which one or more perpetrators attempt to prove their superiority by demonstrating power and dominance over an abuse target. It is a pattern of aggression involving the intentional inflicting of physical, verbal, and/or psychological injury on a target. The abuse portrayed in the Tea Master story demonstrates all of these qualities.

The drive to demonstrate superiority is a normal human attribute that everyone has to some degree. There is nothing wrong with striving to satisfy this need, the problem is the means the abuser uses to do so. Healthy individuals strive to prove their value through the creative means of improving themselves. In contrast, abusers strive to prove their value through destructive means. I place these means in three categories:

- **Self-Esteem Violations:** Acts designed to reduce the target's self-image: controlling, humiliating, shaming, disgracing, putting down, embarrassing, dominating, name-calling, ridicule, insults
- **Social-Esteem Violations:** Acts designed to reduce the target's social standing: denying membership, rejecting, isolating, public humiliation, rumor spreading
- **Safety Violations:** Acts that threaten the target's safety: physical intimidation, threats, pushing, tripping, spitting, property damage, stealing, hitting, kicking, assault, sexual assault, attacks with weapons

Abuse comes in a wide variety of forms and seriousness. The spectrum of seriousness runs from minor acts of degradation to extreme violence intended to kill. The categories of abuse include child abuse, spousal abuse, peer abuse (also known as bullying), sexual abuse, harassment, and hazing.

Rape is a form of abuse. The theoretical bar or street fight that is so often mentioned in martial arts discussions is likely a form of abuse. Sexual harassment in the workplace is a form of abuse.

In understanding abuse, it is important to recognize that there is always a minimum of three participants in an abusive situation: an abuser, an abuse target, and the greater community. In the story, we tend to focus on the Tea Master and the Bully Samurai, but a very important participant that often goes unacknowledged is the community in which the abuse is taking place.

Whatever its form, abusive behavior follows some remarkably consistent patterns. Abusers search for targets that will easily allow them to invade boundaries and thus demonstrate superiority. Unfortunately, they usually don't have to look very far. The way an abuser looks for a good target is a lot like a job interview, but in this case it is an interview that the applicant definitely wants to fail. In the interview process, the abuser covertly screens the available candidates for the right qualities to fill the requirements of the job. Understanding this, it becomes clear that the best way to prevent abuse is to take actions that assure that you will fail the interview. Not recognizing this simple reality almost cost the Tea Master his life.

How does one make sure they fail the interview? The abuser covertly asks his applicants two questions: First, "Do you have the will and ability to defend yourself?" The Tea Master effectively answered, "yes," because his lack of martial arts training made him seem like someone who would be easily defeated. Secondly, the abuser asks, "Will you do a good job filling the basic needs that I am attempting to satisfy?" The Tea Master's high rank made beating him a valuable prize, so the answer was again "yes." Because of these "yes" answers, he got the job of abuse target. To make sure that you fail the interview, and therefore don't become the target of abuse, you simply need to make sure that the abuser answers these questions with resounding "NO!"

Abuse is a competitive strategy. For an abuser, life is a game to be played. Relationships are contests to be waged for the spoils of victory. Other people are viewed as either on their team, on the opposing team, or in the bleachers. They perceive themselves to be "winners" and their targets to be "losers." Their goal is to dominate the opposition, and they don't like situations where they are not in control.

Abusers use a competitive strategy because it has worked for them in the past. This pattern of behavior is often generational. The child learns from the abusive father and/or mother that this is acceptable behavior for getting his needs met. He then applies these lessons to other areas of his life. It works because in most social spheres, an abuser is able to zero in on at least one person whom they can get to play their game.

Many abusers live by the motto that the best defense is a strong offense, and this is seen in their aggressive behavior. Abusers have what in psychology is called a "hostile attributional bias." This means they perceive other's actions as challenges. For example, if someone cuts them off while driving, they don't see it as an accident; they see it as a call to action. Another quality of many abusers is that they like to keep "score." They place a high value on winning, and especially don't like to lose.

In a negotiation, an abuser will usually be operating with a "win-at-any-cost" set of rules. For them, achieving a desired end justifies the use of any means to reach it. Lying, cheating, deception, and so forth, are often seen as acceptable. This willingness to use any means to win has certain advantages, especially if the abuser can get his target to play by his rules. Because of this they attempt to claim the roles of both competitor and referee.

Bullying among kids provides an example of this. One of the bully's rules is that "telling" an authority is not acceptable. In other words, the bully ethic states that it is wrong for his target to seek the help from a higher authority. Unfortunately, most kids have bought into this bully rule. They are afraid of being labeled a "tattletale" or "cry baby" if they seek help from someone who has the power to stop the bullying.

Who made this rule, and who is the sole benefactor of it? The bully is of course. One of the most effective ways to end bullying is to create an alliance with an authority that is willing and able to intervene in an abusive situation. Bullies know that if abuse targets won't seek help for fear of violating the bully ethic, their ability to prevent the abuse will be severely handicapped.

The difficulty in preventing abuse is increased by the fact that an abuser will seldom pick on a worthy opponent. Why would they take the risk of confronting individuals who are willing and able to defend themselves, when there are so many people who are not? Abusers want easy targets, and that means individuals whom they perceive to be less powerful. A consistent pattern of abusive situations is a significant power differential between the abuser and his target.

Knowing what the abuser hopes to gain through his behavior will help you understand how to make sure that he perceives you to be an unrewarding target. To explain why, it is helpful to understand the three intrinsic elements of all conflict negotiation: issues, positions, and interests.

Issues are *what* are being negotiated. The issue is the content of the negotiation that is in contention. Positions are the strategies that are proposed for *how* to resolve the issues. The driving force behind the issues and positions are interests. Interests are the motivating *why* that transcends all relationships and actions.

- To discover the:
  - o **Issue**- Ask: *What* is being negotiated?
  - o **Position**- Ask: *How* does each party propose to resolve an issue?
  - o **Interests**- Ask: *Why* is the issue an issue, and what benefits would accrue if this issue were resolved?

At their most basic level, interests are human needs. Some examples of interests from Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs are:

- **Physiological**- air, water, shelter, nourishment.
- **Safety**- security, stability, protection, freedom from fear, order, limits, justice
- **Belongingness**- friendship, social affiliation, love, affection, camaraderie, community
- **Esteem**- self-esteem, social esteem, social status, pride, fairness
- **Actualization**- An individual's need to realize his or her highest potential, intellectually, aesthetic, and spiritually.

When you look beneath the surface, all conflict negotiation is about interest satisfaction. Interests are satisfied through positions that solve issues. The first interest that an abuser is attempting to satisfy is self-esteem: the desire to reinforce his sense of self worth. Contrary to popular myth, most abusers actually test as having a high sense of self worth, assurance, and confidence. Abusers are not generally meek people wearing an aggressive mask. In most cases, they truly do believe in their own superiority and will defend this belief aggressively. The abusive behavior simply reinforces what they already believe to be true.

The other primary interest that the abuser is attempting to satisfy is his need to increase his status within a social group. Whether we humans like to admit it or not, like our animal kin, we have an innate drive for social status. In the book *Demonic Males*, Wrangham and Peterson present a convincing case that most male violence (and most human violence involves males) is rooted in the drive to increase social status that is a part of our evolutionary legacy.

It is interesting to note that the target of abuse has very similar interests to the abuser, with two exceptions. First, the target of abuse also is concerned with safety interests as well as self-esteem and social status. Second, while the abuser is trying to satisfy interests, the target is working to prevent his interests from being violated. These are very different perspectives.

The motivations behind abuse fit remarkably well with this model of understanding. Abusers seek increased status through demonstrating dominance over another individual. In the peer group that witnesses this behavior this creates the fear that the abuser will direct his attentions towards them. In this way, the abuser receives the group's respect and fulfills his need for control. It seems to matter very little that this respect is born of fear rather than admiration and friendship.

Why do abusers use a strategy of abuse to satisfy their interests? Through the years there has been little consensus concerning the roots of aggression. There are two schools of thought. One, commonly known as "nature," holds that aggression is part of the human biological makeup. The other, "nurture," holds that aggression is the result of learned behavioral patterns. Current thinking seems to hold that both are contributors.

Nobody can deny that humans are capable of horrific violence. These acts range from simple abuse, to murder, torture, genocide, and slavery. The capacity to carry out this type of behavior seems to be programmed into human genes. It is likely that for much of our history as a species, this sort of aggressive behavior fulfilled an important function that led to the greater evolutionary success of those individuals capable of it.

Although the capacity for violence is genetic, it is the environmental factors, including nurture, that determine when, where, and how violence manifests itself. For healthy individuals, the capacity for violence is an inherent trait, but it is kept in check by other inherent traits that keep it from manifesting at inappropriate times, places, or situations. For these individuals, it takes a specific mix of environmental conditions to bring the aggression forth. In contrast, the abusive individual's psychological limiters on aggression are either lacking or distorted. This allows these individuals to act with aggression that most of us would consider inappropriate.

The ability to empathize with another is one of the most significant limiters on aggression. In abusive individuals this ability is underdeveloped. This leaves them untroubled by the pain and suffering they inflict on their. This lack of empathy probably contributes to the lack of guilt that bullies feel for their actions. In fact, contrary to feeling guilt, the abuser is able to fully justify his or her actions. In most cases, they self-righteously blame their targets for causing the abuse. This makes abuse a very difficult and dangerous problem to solve.

The issues in abuse, like all negotiation, fall into two categories: substance and relationship. Substance is the content of what is being negotiated and might include things like who gets what, who does what, etc. Although the abuser's substantive issues are sometimes real, most often they are excuses designed to justify the abuser's position. In our story, the Bully Samurai had no substantive issue with the Tea Master, so he simply made one up. This is often the case with abusive individuals. In child abuse, an abuser might take issue with a child's crying as a justification for beating them. The date rapist might make an issue out of the fact that he bought dinner to justify his position that she owes him sex.

In fact, abusers can make an issue out of anything that can possibly be perceived to be a challenge, real or imagined. Because of this, it is usually futile to attempt to resolve an abuser's substantive issues. Yet, ignoring them will often give the abuser grounds for escalating the conflict. A good strategy is to acknowledge the bully's substantive issue while keeping a covert understanding that resolving that issue will seldom resolve the conflict.

Beneath the abuser's substantive issue lies the real problem that he is trying to solve. The abuser's primary issue is the relationship. In other words, the issue that the abuser must successfully negotiate to meet his needs is the nature of his relationship with the target. The abuser's position is that his interests will be satisfied if the target agrees to enter an abuser/victim relationship.

An important step in learning how to handle abusive people is to recognize that abuse is primarily a relationship issue. Every action an abuser takes is directed towards the goal of controlling the

nature of the relationship with the abuse target. When faced with relationship issues, Fisher and Ury in the best selling *Getting to Yes* recommend that we "Separate the relationship from the substance; (and) deal directly with the people problem." This is exactly what Aikido does. Never in Aikido are substantive issues addressed. Aikido is solely focused on negotiating relationship issues. This is because Aikido training is a role-play of an abuse scenario that is an example of a relationship that is so dysfunctional that negotiating substance is absurd.

### **Bully Samurai**

<b>Substantive Issue-</b>	the petty complaint in invented
<b>Relationship Issue-</b>	his need the create an abuser/victim relationship
<b>Position-</b>	to solve the issues, the Tea Master must be the Bully Samurai's victim
<b>Interest-</b>	self-esteem, social esteem

### **Tea Master**

<b>Substantive Issue-</b>	none, yet must acknowledge the abuser's issues
<b>Relationship Issue-</b>	the need to not be in an abusive relationship
<b>Position-</b>	If I live, then you live. If I die then you die.
<b>Interests-</b>	safety, self-esteem, social status

For the abuser, the purpose of his abusive behavior is to establish the relationship of abuser/victim. As a target of abuse, what you are trying to prevent is the abuser forcing you into the role of victim. It is very common for the targets of abusive behavior to blame their troubles on the abuser. Although there is certainly some truth to this, in terms of solving the problem it is not a useful attitude. In your relationship with an abuser, don't naively believe that you have the power to change the abuser. What you do have direct power to control is the role *you* play in your relationship with the abuser. I suggest that you exercise this power by not adopting the role of "victim."

Unfortunately, if the abuser is powerful enough, he may be capable of causing you injury against your will. Since the dictionary defines victim as "a person who suffers from a destructive or injurious action," this would seem to place you in the category of victim. The trouble I have with the concept of victim is that there are many examples of people who have terrible things happen to them, yet handle it with such grace and dignity that no one would ever consider labeling them a victim.

My friend Molly Hale was in a terrible car wreck that left her largely paralyzed, yet I see her every year at Aikido summer camp participating with a spirit that puts the rest of us to shame. Through her hard work and perseverance, she has made a remarkable recovery that has exceeded the doctor's projections many times. I once told her that she was my hero for the way she handled this tragic event. Her response was, "What choice did I have?" She saw that she could either be a victim of her circumstances, or move on and live to her fullest capacity. Molly recently received her third-degree black belt in Aikido. So my advice is even if you are the "victim" of unfortunate circumstances, never allow yourself to take on the role of victim. What other choices do you have? That is the subject of the remainder of this essay.

### **The 5 Meta-Strategies of Conflict Negotiation**

When we get visitors at the dojo (training studio), they almost always ask whether Aikido is a defensive or offensive system. Right from the start the question is flawed. It assumes that the only two choices are the competitive modes of offense and defense, and that Aikido would therefore have to fall into one of those categories. This is a common misperception, and it is essential that we change it. The problem is that if your map only lists one destination you will end up there every time. In reality, competition is only one of five possible meta-strategies for negotiating conflict. The other four are avoidance, accommodation, compromise, and collaboration.

A conflict resolution strategy is a specific plan of action for satisfying interests. A meta-strategy is a strategy of strategies. For abusers, competition is their dominant meta-strategy. Please recognize

that this does not mean that all competitive individuals are abusers. There are many people who approach life from a competitive perspective, but express the competitive drive in much healthier ways.

For the target of abuse, the question becomes what is the best meta-strategy for dealing with an abuser? Any of these meta-strategies might be appropriate in the right situation and each holds its own unique set of benefits and problems. Let's first look at avoidance.

### **Avoidance**

Avoidance means to take actions that allow you to not have to negotiate the conflict. If the Tea Master had not shown up for the match, and gone out of his way to stay out of the presence of the Bully Samurai, he would have been using an avoidance strategy. Avoidance is a good choice when the timing and conditions are wrong and you know you will be unsuccessful. For example, if you are unprepared to negotiate a conflict, putting it off until you can be better prepared is a useful strategy.

In Aikido, avoidance is an important skill, but one that is only used as a temporary tactic until the Aikidoka can improve his position. Most Aikido techniques involve moving in ways that avoid the damaging power of the attack. If the Aikidoka were to successfully use a strategy of pure avoidance he will never get hit or grabbed, but the attacker would still be free to continue his attacks. The primary purpose of avoidance in Aikido is to prevent injuries that would turn the Aikidoka into a victim.

Avoidance makes a very poor life strategy. In life, success requires relationships. Since conflict is an inevitable part of relationship, if avoidance is your dominant strategy, then relationships will end at the moment a conflict arises. Life without relationships will leave the avoider lonely and unsuccessful. For example, if the Tea Master had avoided the Bully Samurai he would have spent the rest of his life with this unresolved conflict hanging over him. He saw this option as having such a negative impact on his life that he was willing to die rather than go on living under those circumstances. Unfortunately, many a child lives under this yoke when they use a long-term avoidance strategy at school to elude a bully who has threatened him or her.

Another problem with relying on an avoidance strategy is that in real life it is not always possible. The child who is harassed by a bully will find it very difficult to avoid contact if the bully is in his or her class. For the employee with an abusive boss, it might mean having to quit an otherwise desirable job. How many times have we heard of abusive husbands who violate restraining orders obtained by ex-wives to avoid contact? Avoidance can be a good interim tactic, but much better long-term resolution will be found through other meta-strategies.

### **Accommodation**

The next meta-strategy I will look at is accommodation. Accommodation is when a person gives up his or her interests in order to satisfy another's interests. The Tea Master's opening position, like that of most abuse victims, provides a good example of accommodation. The Tea Master was willing to accommodate the Bully Samurai by giving up his interest in living.

Accommodation is the meta-strategy most focused on the quality of the relationship. Therefore it is useful for negotiations where maintaining the relationship is held to be of greater value than the substance that is being negotiated. In fact, accommodation is a necessary element in developing and maintaining relationships. This is because all healthy relationships require give and take to survive and prosper. Sometimes you will accommodate another's interests and sometimes they will accommodate yours. Accommodation is the way that we create the necessary plasticity that maintaining a relationship requires.

One of the distinctive qualities of Aikido is its use of accommodation, although it is usually referred to as "blending" in the dojo. It is very common in many martial arts to block attacks. Aikido seldom does this. In most Aikido technique, the opening movement is to change position in order to avoid uke's attack. By sidestepping the attack and assuming a new position that is in close proximity, but



not in direct opposition, the Aikidoka physically accommodates the attack. The trick is in doing this with integrity.

For example, an abusive individual has called you a mean and nasty name like “dumb old poopy head.” If your position accommodates the content of the attacker’s position by agreeing with it, you will have sacrificed your integrity, unless of course it is true that you have a low IQ, are getting on in years, and your head has poop on it. If not, accommodating the abuser’s position with integrity will involve seeing the situation from a higher perspective. This means recognizing the attacker’s position, and labeling it for what it is: an abuse motivated attack. Accommodating the attack with integrity places the Aikidoka in the best position from which to solve the problem that the attack presents.

In extreme abuse situations accommodation can be a life saving strategy. If confronted by a gun-wielding thief, accommodate him by handing over your wallet. Your first goal in a violent encounter is to survive. To do so may mean doing things that you really don’t want to do. Remember, the encounter is not over when you part. Surviving will allow you to later take appropriate action to properly resolve the conflict.

Like avoidance, accommodation is a good temporary strategy that fills a specific function, but a poor life strategy. Accommodation actually can work well as long as the only people the accommodator ever interacts with are other accommodators. Of course the chances of that are close to zero. The problem comes when the person who is overly accommodating develops a relationship with a competitive individual. Competitive individuals thrive on accommodators. The accommodator will end up satisfying the competitor’s needs at the expense of his own. This is a classic abuse scenario.

In life, there is no place for pathological accommodation. Never let another person abuse you. Gandhi is well known to have been an ardent adherent to nonviolence, yet he said he would rather see a person fight back with violence than accommodate injustice out of fear. Fortunately, there is a better choice than these. Before we get to it, let’s look at responding to the abuser’s competitive strategy with a competitive strategy of your own.

### **Competition**

Competition is a very common strategy and there is no denying that it can also be very effective for satisfying interests. Competition is the strategy of a person who seeks to fulfill his interests at the expense of others. It is the most results-orientated strategy, and places the least value on the relationship with the other party.

A good example of what happens when two competitors meet is the tournament ring of competitive martial arts. When the bell rings, each competitor moves toward the other looking for weaknesses in the other’s position. Usually they will begin by testing the opponent’s position until a true weakness is found. At that point they will pound away at it in the hope of scoring points. Whoever scores the most points is deemed the winner. It is important to note that even when you win, if your opponent was a worthy one, you could be nursing your bruises for many weeks to come.

This is a physical representation of what Fisher and Ury in *Getting To Yes* call “positional negotiation.” In a positional negotiation, each party usually starts by addressing the issues, but as they stake out positions, the focus shifts to proving their position’s superiority. When this happens, the issues, and therefore solving them to achieve interest satisfaction, are often forgotten. The negotiation becomes an ego-based contest that usually ends in a compromise that leaves both parties’ interests poorly satisfied.

This is the proper way to play a competitive game, but when applied to human relationship it can be unnecessarily destructive. The process of attacking the opponent’s position while defending your own is very hard on relationships. This goes a long way toward explaining why the abuser is generally respected but seldom liked by his peers.

If there is a significant power differential, whoever is more powerful will win the prize. The problem that an abuse target is faced with in attempting to use a competitive strategy is the fact that abusers seldom choose targets that are evenly matched with them. If the Tea Master had tried to out compete the Bully Samurai he would have surely lost. He knew this and so did the Bully Samurai.

The alternative to Positional Negotiation that is suggested by Fisher and Ury is "Principled Negotiation." In Principled Negotiation, like Aikido, success means attaining a high degree of interest satisfaction. This is a very different definition of success than in Positional Negotiation, where success means beating the other party. A problem with Positional Negotiation is that it is possible to beat the other party, yet not achieve optimal interest satisfaction. In other words, you can "win the battle, but lose the war." This is how most people feel when their competitive strategy leads to compromise.

### **Compromise**

Compromise lives right between competition and accommodation in that both parties give on some interests and take on others. The problem with compromise is that in most cases nobody experiences optimal satisfaction. This is because compromise is usually the result of a competitive process in which the parties are acting as adversaries. The focus on winning means the parties' actions are directed as much towards making sure the other party's interests are not satisfied, as they are in satisfying their own. This usually leaves everyone feeling unsatisfied. Perhaps this is why most people dislike conflict so much.

### **The Collaborative Aiki Strategy**

The Aikido answer is to refuse to negotiate conflict as a contest. When you take a higher perspective, you quickly see that negotiating to win points and prove your position is not the most effective way to satisfy interests. The most effective strategy is collaboration.

In collaboration, people work together to solve the issues in conflict in ways that most interests are equitably satisfied, and the relationships are strengthened. Collaboration unites the competitive position's emphasis on substantive results, with the accommodating position's emphasis on relationship. The Principled Negotiation of *Getting to Yes* is one example of a collaborative strategy. Aikido is another.

Collaboration is the most powerful meta-strategy because of its ability to step out of the limited zero-sum game of competition, compromise, and accommodation. Zero-sum is a term from the field of math called "games theory." It refers to a negotiation where the "pie" that is being divided is perceived to be fixed in size. In a zero-sum negotiation a gain by one side means a corresponding loss by the other. Collaboration is synergetic rather than zero-sum. Its synergetic nature means it has the ability to increase the size of the "pie." To explain this, I'll use an example of a negotiation from *Getting to Yes*.

You and another party are given an orange that you both want. If you avoid the negotiation, the other party will get the orange by default, and your needs will go unmet. If you accommodate the other party by letting them have the orange, your needs again go unmet. If you compete with the other party and win, you get the orange, but the relationship lies in ruins. If you both compete, it is most likely that you will end up in a compromise where you each get half of the orange. This is better than no orange, but as you will see is not the optimal possible result.

A collaborator first takes the time to understand the interests that both sides are trying to meet. Once he is clear on the interests, he takes the time to look for creative solutions to the issues that stand in the way of satisfying those interests. It is common that through the collaborative process, new solutions will be created that were not possible for each individual separately. In addition, the two parties will often discover that many of their individual needs dovetail. These new solutions have the effect of synergetically allowing each party to get more of what they really want.

In the orange negotiation, by working to understand the other party's interests, you discover that they completely complement yours. You want the orange for its peel to use in baking a cake, and the other party wants to make juice. In this case, both of your needs are met completely.

OTHER PARTY	YOU	OTHER PARTY	YOU	TOTAL	TYPE
competition	avoidance	1	0	1	zero-win
competition	accommodation	1	0	1	zero-sum
accommodation	competition	0	1	1	zero-sum
compromise	compromise	1/2	1/2	1	zero-sum
collaboration	collaboration	1	1	2	synergetic

This negotiation demonstrates the synergetic nature of collaboration. Still, few negotiations are as tidy as this one. It is common to end up with less substantive gain when you collaborate, than if you had negotiated competitively and won. The problem with going for the win is that competitors almost always end up compromising. Since a competitive negotiation is destructive in nature, when you end up compromising you are dividing the smallest possible pie. Because collaboration is creative in nature, you end up with the largest equitable division.

The very worst case of collaboration is where the parties are unable to increase the size of the pie or get interests to dovetail. In this case, they end up with the same substantive gain as the competitor who has compromised, but with one big difference. In collaboration the relationship has been improved. In competition the relationship has usually been damaged. From a short-term perspective this might not matter, but in the long term this makes a very big difference. As a life conflict strategy, collaboration comes out way ahead because its ability to improve relationships leads to greater opportunities for long-term gain.

This gives the collaborative strategy the extraordinary ability to get the other party to join you rather than fight you. When given the choice between ending up with the lowest possible gain and a damaged relationship, and the highest possible gain and an improved relationship, all but the most die-hard competitors will choose to collaborate.

This is exactly what the Sword Master's strategy did. When the Tea Master held his sword in a position that was poised to strike, his message to the Bully Samurai was that I'm only going to be in one of two relationships with you: compromise or collaboration. This strategy forced the Bully Samurai to choose between the best equitable result, and the worst. He would have preferred winning, but the Sword Master's strategy took that option away. When given only the choice between both men living and both men dying, the Bully Samurai chose to live.

You could argue that from the Bully Samurai's perspective, this was not collaboration since he did not get his needs met. My response is that from a higher perspective he did. For starters he lived. Besides this, it is not in the Bully Samurai's best interest to abuse others. Studies that followed children identified to be bullies through to adulthood, show that they are seldom successful in life. The findings show that these bullies achieve less academically, socially, economically, and occupationally than non-abusive peers. They also have more trouble with the law with more arrests and convictions for serious crimes. Keeping an abuser from abusing is to help him fulfill his higher interests, even if he doesn't see it that way.

In my opinion, the best approach for achieving success in life is through collaborative strategies. Still, when I explain the power of collaboration to people, they inevitably agree that it makes sense in theory, but negotiations aren't like that in real life. They say that it's a "dog eat dog" world out there, and if you adopt the nice collaborative position you will get "eaten alive." The perception is that "nice guys finish last." When collaboration is done right, nothing is farther from the truth.

Proper collaboration is nice, but that does not necessarily mean it is vulnerable to abuse. Like the offensive and defensive sides of the competitive strategy, collaboration also has two sides: a creative side and a preventive side. The creative side is concerned with taking actions that will lead to the

highest possible level of interest satisfaction. It is important to recognize that collaborative strategies are just as committed to interest satisfaction as competitive strategies. The difference is that collaborative strategies are a lot smarter about it.

The preventative side of collaboration is concerned with making sure that interests are not exploited. Without a powerful preventive side, a competitive other party will likely go for the win. Having a powerful preventive side forces the competitor to compromise. Having a powerful creative side gives the competitor the option of choosing an even higher level of interest satisfaction than compromise. Since winning is not an option, the smartest choice is collaboration.

We see this clearly in our story. If the Tea Master did not have the power to injure the Bully Samurai, his strategy would not have worked. So it is essential to realize that collaboration only works with an aggressively competitive party if it has this preventative power. Collaboration is not a second-choice strategy for those who do not have the power to be effective at competition. Collaboration is a strategy for those who recognize its distinct advantages and want to exercise power with optimal long-term effectiveness.

How can one learn to approach life from the powerful perspective of collaboration? Aikido training is one way. Hey, I'm an Aikido teacher, what were you expecting me to say? Many people view Aikido as simply a method of self-defense. To see it this way is to miss the true scope and power of the art. Aikido is certainly about negotiating your relationship with an abusive individual, but its highest purpose is creating an optimal relationship with life.

Through a great deal of training, the Aikidoka transforms his perspective on life to one that is collaborative in nature. This was the secret that Aikido founder Morihei Ueshiba discovered through his intense study of martial arts. Consider these quotes by Ueshiba from his son Kissomaru's book entitled Aikido.

*The secret of Aikido is to harmonize ourselves with the movement of the universe and bring ourselves into accord with the universe itself. He who has gained the secret of Aikido has the universe in himself and can say, "I am the universe."*

*You are mistaken if you think that budo (martial arts) means to have opponents and enemies and to be strong and fell them. There are neither opponents nor enemies for true budo. True budo is to be one with the universe; that is to be united with the center of the universe.*

Clearly Ueshiba considered his extraordinary powers to be rooted in his collaborative relationship with life. This alliance with life itself meant he approached conflicts from the position of greatest power and integrity. Adopting this optimal position is a great way to fail an abuser's interview for a target. If you should run into someone who in spite of this is still determined to violate your boundaries, it is the best position from which to negotiate resolution.

To explain the Aikido approach to negotiating resolution with the extreme case of an aggressive and unprincipled competitive negotiator who is intent on abuse, I have developed the following guidelines. These guidelines are not theoretical. They have been adapted to the conflicts of daily life from what I have found to be effective in the practice of Aikido. To learn how to put these guidelines into practical application you will either have to come to my workshop or read the rest of my upcoming book.

# **Aiki Negotiation Guidelines**

## **Part One- Getting Centered in the Position of Greatest Power and Integrity**

1. Develop a map of the territory of this conflict that will allow you to view it from the highest practical perspective.
  - a. Develop a general understanding of the nature of human relationship and particularly the ways of conflict resolution. Then apply that understanding to specific conflicts.
  - b. Who are the participants? There is a minimum of three participants: the other party, the greater community, and you.
  - c. What are the other parties' perspectives? What is the community's perspective? Put yourself in the other parties' shoes.
  - d. What are the substantive issues? What are the relationship issues?
  - e. What are the underlying interests? What interests dovetail? What interests compete?
  - f. What are the other party's positions?
2. Adopt the collaboratively-based Aiki Negotiation strategy.
  - a. Seek success rather than victory. Success means the highest possible degree of equitable interest satisfaction.
  - b. Commit to maintaining the Aiki Negotiation strategy regardless of the other party's actions.
3. Set and maintain clear boundaries that are appropriate to the relationship.
  - a. Balance the creative and preventive sides so as to present boundaries that are appropriate to this relationship.
  - b. Enter the negotiation with a position that is open to creating a healthy collaborative relationship but closed to abuse.
4. Empower your boundaries through ethical means.
  - a. Get clear on your code of ethics and commit to maintaining it regardless of the other party's actions.
  - b. Invite your allies to sit in on the negotiation: friends, authority figures, the law, rules, and the truth.
  - c. Develop strong BATNAs (best alternative to a negotiated agreement).
  - d. When possible, exercise your power to control the time and place of the negotiation. Do so for the purpose of creating equality.
  - e. Train to improve your skills and abilities.
  - f. Be open and honest in all of your actions.

## **Part Two- Negotiating the Relationship**

1. Respond to boundary violations immediately, reliably, and appropriately.
  - a. Don't allow unethical behavior to go unanswered.
  - b. As they approach, reach out and greet them; as they withdraw, let them go. Mirror movement.
  - c. Take an attitude of collaborative equality in your responses: don't be an aggressor, but don't be a victim either.
  - d. Be forgiving but smart. If they retreat don't hold a grudge, instead, reevaluate your boundaries, then reestablish your position based on this new information.
2. Sidestep personal attacks.
  - a. Don't get entrenched in your positions. Instead, demonstrate great positional flexibility.
  - b. Step out of the path of the attack so as to avoid injury.
  - c. Use your positional flexibility to improve your relationship to the attacker by adopting a position that is not in direct opposition to the other parties.
  - d. Use your positional flexibility to unite your perspectives by adopting a position that views the issues from a similar direction.
  - e. Be responsive to changes in the other party's positions.
3. Accept and accommodate the other party's positions without sacrificing the integrity of yours.

- a. Avoid trying to block the other party from taking a position. Instead, accept that the other party's positions present a problem that you will have to deal with.
  - b. Allow them to have their position as long as you can do so without injury.
  - c. Recognize that you can accommodate the other party's positions without agreeing with them.
4. Focus on improving the integrity of your position, instead of trying to damage theirs.
    - a. Don't allow the other party's actions to unbalance the integrity of your state. Stay centered in the position of greatest integrity.
    - b. The position of greatest integrity is one that is most in harmony with the greater objective truth of Universe. Align your position with the highest truth and thereby act in harmony with it.
    - c. You will know if an action increases the integrity of your position if it makes your position less vulnerable to attack.
    - d. Don't attempt to force the other party to change their positions, instead use the integrity of your position to influence. Improving the integrity of your position has the remarkable ability to draw out weaknesses in the other party's position.
    - e. Never sacrifice your integrity to reach resolution. Don't be shortsighted; instead keep your long-term perspective.
  5. Root your power in tenshin type actions.
    - a. There are two possible forces to use in responding to and attack: irimi and tenshin. Irimi means to enter. All attacks begin as irimi force. Tenshin means to turn. Aikido is at its best when nage employs tenshin force in response to the irimi force of an attack. Tenshin force is the most difficult to counter. Tenshin force helps de-escalate the conflict by not giving it more fuel.
    - b. At this point, it is possible to counter-attack with what is called in Aikido "atemi." Atemi means to strike the body and is irimi in nature. However, in Aikido atemi is seldom used to cause injury. Instead, the potential of atemi is used to sway uke's actions. Actually causing injury will make it much more difficult to use Aiki Negotiation.
    - c. Don't use irimi force to attack the other party's positions. Instead, use tenshin force to test its integrity.
    - d. Don't attempt to force your solutions on the other party. Instead, draw the other party into co-creating solutions.
    - e. Although you are primarily focused on the relationship, you can also use this opportunity to better understand the other party's substantive issues, and interests.
    - f. Asking questions and listening are examples of tenshin force in an oral conflict. Use lots of questions and great listening to draw information from the other party that can lead to understanding and resolution. Uke is the best source for the information you need to create solutions. Listen intently to the answers, both spoken and unspoken. Keep your positions focused on improving the relationship.
    - g. If uke pulls back, either break the connection, or move with him. Avoid attempting to use this as an opportunity to counter-attack.
  6. Seek to solve relationship issues through creative solutions.
    - a. Avoid counterattacking the other parties personally. Don't attempt to solve the problem by solving the person. Instead, direct your actions toward his actions and positions.
    - b. Don't get caught in a competition over positions. Instead focus your energies on solving issues and satisfying interests.
    - c. Remain very open to how you achieve that goal. "The best strategy relies upon unlimited responses."
    - d. Focus your energy on those things you have the power to change. You don't have the power to change the attacker, but you do have the power to change your relationship with the attacker. Focus on improving the relationship and then resolving the substantive issues.
    - e. "Uke will tell you the solution." The other party's positions and actions are the best source of the information you need to reach resolution.

- f. Get the other party invested in the solution by involving them in creating it. Make your solution the choice they want.
- 7. "Build them a golden bridge."
  - a. Create the optimal conditions for the other party to choose the highest equitable resolution of the conflict.
  - b. Take actions that make competing a stupid choice, and collaboration a smart choice.
  - c. Allow them a dignified retreat.
- 8. Allow the other parties to experience the natural consequences of their actions
  - a. Your goal in applying a technique is to control the uke so they can't hurt you, others, or himself. Although your action is protective in nature, it is not your responsibility to shield them from the natural consequences of their actions.
  - b. Aikido technique is at its best when uke experiences it as the natural consequence of their actions
  - c. Don't seek to intentionally injure uke; yet don't shield them from the natural consequences of his actions.
- 9. Forgive but don't forget
  - a. Don't hold a grudge for past transgressions. Instead forgive and move on.
  - b. Ask for restitution for your injuries, but don't expect punitive damages.
  - c. Be realistic, set your new boundaries based on your past experience.

### **Part Three- Negotiating Substance**

- 1. Seek creative solutions that lead to a high degree of interest satisfaction for all parties.
  - a. Seek to increase the size of the pie.
  - b. Explore ways to get interests to dovetail.
- 2. Insist on taking a higher perspective by using objective standards to resolve issues when interests are in opposition.
- 3. "When the fruit is ripe, catch it as it falls from the tree."
  - a. Patiently wait until the moment is right and then take decisive action.
  - b. Don't force solutions.
  - c. Be cautious and patient, but don't hesitate to act when the moment is ripe.
  - d. Don't intentionally cause injury to an attacker, but accept that injury is a possible natural consequence of an attacking position. Don't seek punitive damages or try to teach the other party a lesson.
  - e. At this point you want to sweat the details.
  - f. Make sure the agreement is clear to all involved.

### **Session: Aikido and The Art of Principled Negotiation- E5**

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