

Power & Presence

Spring/Summer 2004

Ideas and inspiration on conflict, communication and creating the life you want

Wearing the Hakama: Lessons in Leadership

There's a song from the 60's that goes, "It was An Itsy Bitsy, Teeny Weeny, Yellow Polka Dot Bikini, That she wore for the first time today, An Itsy Bitsy, Teeny Weeny, Yellow Polka Dot Bikini, So in the water she wanted to stay." The song is about a young woman wearing a bikini for the first time. She manages to get into the water but is afraid to come out because someone might see her.

I had a similar feeling the first time I wore my hakama. In our aikido tradition, those earning a black belt are required to wear a hakama. It usually takes a minimum of six to eight years of committed practice and numerous tests to reach this level. Prior to this we wear a white practice uniform (called a gi) and a white belt. Once we become a black belt, however, we wear a long pair of very wide black culottes that fall from waist to ankle and are tied on with four long straps. The hakama signifies that those wearing it are entitled to be called "beginners" in the art of aikido. We've shown that we understand the basics of technique and are ready to learn the subtleties of the art.

Assuming Leadership

Of course, those wearing the white gi look on the hakama as a symbol of leadership. They expect the wearer to know what she's doing, to throw hard, and to be able to handle martial power. When I first put it on, I began to think about the bikini song.

Up to this point, though I was the founder of my aikido dojo, I wore a white gi and looked like everyone else. I was nominally the chief instructor, but in reality most of our classes were taught by visiting black belt instructors from sister schools in Cambridge and Portland. Putting on the hakama meant becoming in fact the chief instructor, and the leader in ways I was not sure I knew how to handle. I was afraid to come out of the water.

Luckily I had some help. It came first from my brother, Mike, a retired Naval Reserve Captain. He said that he appreciated the feelings I must be having wearing my "new get-up" in front of people who understood its importance. He was also confident that I would recognize the responsibility and uphold all of the traditions that came with it.

I realized that people would expect more of me now. That was my fear, of course, and Mike helped me to understand that it was also my new responsibility.

Coming Out

I looked around to see how others wore their hakama and how they handled the rank that it implied. I had many good role models – excellent teachers who mentor me and help our students understand proper etiquette, support our dojo, and do it all with patience and persistence.

I began to walk the path of the leader of the dojo. I realized that my students wanted me to do it, and were watching to see if I would take up the mantle. I understood that to hide would be a

disservice to them and to aikido. I found my center, stood straighter, and walked onto the mat with an expanded vision. This was in fact my school. Putting on the hakama, I accepted leadership in ways I had not done before, and each new challenge offered new lessons.

I learned that a skilled leader creates a safe structure. In an aikido dojo, an unsafe environment could mean someone gets hurt, and I realize one of my primary functions is to protect. This means supporting students in safe practice and personal responsibility. It also means making some tough calls to keep people from accidentally injuring each other. If etiquette is breached, I point it out. Sloppy technique is noticed and corrected. When commitments are not kept I speak up.

I have become conscious over the years of the subtle process by which my students, co-instructors and I create the environment of our school. I think that one of the ways a leader uses her power is to encourage vision. She keeps the vision alive by reminding others of shared goals, rules, and culture. Over time students enroll in the vision and join in to protect and support the

environment. In our dojo, more advanced students help beginners to bow correctly, wear a clean gi, vacuum the mat, feel at home. We all hold the vision, and gradually new leaders emerge.

Rank and Responsibility

In my work with corporate and government groups I see many wonderful leaders with their own applications of these principles. In healthy workplaces leaders are not afraid to lead, nor are they afraid to share leadership. With patience and persistence, they praise where appropriate, offer advice, and make difficult decisions. They promote and support the group's vision and help others to lead.

Power and leadership are not bad words. There are, of course, leaders who abuse power. Yet rank used consciously can support, encourage, and invite collaboration and co-creation. Humility, rank, responsibility and power can go hand in hand.

I'm no longer afraid to come out of the water. As I tie on my hakama before practice, I feel the traditions that created it and see the people who have worn it before me. It covers much more than a bikini, after all. It's warm and made of good strong material. It fits me well and holds my body erect, and even makes my aikido better. It's starting to feel well worn, like an old glove that at first seemed stiff and unyielding, and now slides on easily and feels comfortable. I'm learning to love it and to embrace all that it represents.



inspiration

You do not belong to you. You belong to Universe. You may rest assured that if you devote your time and attention to the highest advantage of others, Universe will support you.

—R. Buckminster Fuller

Conflict Management
Communication Skills
Training & Facilitation



real life

**How do you center? Let's count the ways . . .
Many thanks to all who sent stories about how the aikido approach works in your life.**

**From Debbie Rodier, Director of Nursing,
Wentworth Home**

We had a very disgruntled employee who felt he had been wronged by another staff person. We talked with him about our experience with centering and actually demonstrated the process, taking deep breaths and showing him how to move the energy in a positive direction. He noted that it was difficult to be really angry while you are taking in deep breaths. At the end of the meeting, he was calm and smiling. He then confronted the person he was angry with and the problem was resolved. The experience with you really has stayed with us all.

From Kim Oates, speech pathologist

The positive comments you shared with me about my work situation made it so much easier to face the meeting with my supervisor. She was very understanding as I explained my intention at our previous meeting. I feel as if I'm on my way to easing the situation between us, and I have my supervisor's support and understanding as well. My first venture into the world of verbal aikido was a rousing success!

**From Kevin O'Shaughnessy, high school
history teacher**

Last summer my father and I had a big fight. I had just finished spending a week long vacation with friends at our summer cottage. At the end of the week we were cleaning the cottage when Dad showed up. He was very angry and accused my friends and me of dumping garbage up the road instead of taking it with us. I tried to explain that it wasn't our garbage, but Dad wouldn't listen and screamed at me in front of my friends. It's amazing how quickly I turned into an angry teenager.

I barely spoke to my father for several months. When he did call I ended our conversations as quickly as possible. I could not let go of my anger and embarrassment. I felt that if I gave in I would justify his actions.

Then I remembered your advice about getting close to the conflict. The next time my father called I told him why I had been short with him the past few months. I explained that I was upset with his refusal to believe me and to listen to me. My father listened and apologized. Our relationship has continued to improve since then.

resources

Portsmouth Aikido

Portsmouth Aikido is an ongoing martial arts school located at the Seacoast Family Y in Portsmouth. Many of the principles reflected in *Power & Presence* come from aikido, the Japanese martial art that teaches self defense through redirection of energy. Classes are held on Tuesdays and Thursdays at 7:45 p.m. and Sundays at 1:00 and 2:15 p.m. You may stop by anytime and watch a class, or visit our web site for more information.

The next **Aikido Beginner's Class** will start at the Seacoast Family Y on May 16. The six-week course will run through June 20, from 1:00 to 2:00 p.m. each Sunday. The cost is \$50.00 per person for the course and anyone aged 12 and older is welcome. For information or to register, please visit www.PortsmouthAikido.com.

Conflict Coaching

Individual coaching sessions are available to build skills in conflict management or to facilitate conflicts between couples, co-workers, and management teams. Also available are sessions in public speaking, presentations and vocal power and presence. Please let us know how we can help.

Power & Presence Associates

Power & Presence is not just a newsletter – it's a company that provides unique training for specific needs. If your focus is on conflict, communication, or increasing power and presence under stress, we have associates with expertise in leadership development, strategic planning, customer service, powerful presentations and stress management. Please contact us to discuss your training needs.

Difficult Conversations

I recently attended a course based on the book *Difficult Conversations*, by Douglas Stone, Bruce Patton and Sheila Heen, colleagues at the Harvard Negotiation Project. This book has some excellent advice on how to use language more constructively to resolve conflict, build trust and improve relationships. Skills include balancing advocacy with inquiry, changing our perspective from blame to contribution, and separating impact from intent. Please see the "Workshops" section to learn more.



IN MEMORIAM

This issue of *Power & Presence* is dedicated to Mitsunari Kanai Sensei, Chief Instructor at New England Aikikai in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Sensei died Saturday, March 27, 2004. He was a wonderful person, a major force in the aikido community throughout the world, and a friend. Combinations of sweet and powerful are rare. He was one. Thank you, Sensei.



**LOOK AT THIS WINDOW:
IT IS NOTHING BUT A HOLE
IN THE WALL, BUT BECAUSE
OF IT THE WHOLE ROOM IS
FULL OF LIGHT. BEING FULL
OF LIGHT IT BECOMES AN
INFLUENCE BY WHICH
OTHERS ARE SECRETLY
TRANSFORMED.**

— CHUANG TSU

workshops

Women's Self Defense – A One-Day Training in Physical Confidence

Do you wonder what you would do in the event of a physical attack? If you would like to feel more confident physically, generate calm under pressure, and practice verbal and physical skills to disarm a potential assailant, join Fiona Blyth and Judy Ringer for women's self-defense and assertiveness training. Fiona is a 3rd degree black belt in aikido, and teaches at New England Aikikai in Cambridge Massachusetts. Judy Ringer is a black belt in aikido and founder and chief instructor of Portsmouth Aikido, Portsmouth, NH. Participants will:

- Increase physical and emotional power
- Learn to turn a freeze response into an action response
- Practice effective self protection skills for common types of physical assault
- Begin to control fear and make wise choices in physically threatening situations

Knowing the steps ahead of time
is not important; being willing
to engage with the music and
move freely onto the dance floor
is what's key.

– *Leadership and the New Science,*
by Margaret Wheatley.

(See calendar to the right for dates and times.)

I Can't Believe I Said That! – Managing Difficult Conversations

What makes difficult conversations so hard? Based on the text, *Difficult Conversations*, by Stone, Patton and Heen of the Harvard Negotiation Project, this program introduces new strategies for dealing with tough topics, sharing difficult information, and managing interpersonal conflict through listening, talking, and acknowledging what is actually going on. You'll practice mental, emotional and verbal skills that will help you to feel more confident expressing yourself, acknowledging others, and transforming difficult situations into learning conversations.

Beyond Smiles: Service Excellence – First Time, Every Time!

New!

Judy Ringer and M.L. Hannay team up in this intense, high-energy workshop that takes you through a process of moving from "Good to Great" in the eyes of your customers. You will partner with other participants, learning what each of you could do differently in order to enhance customer satisfaction. Come prepared to develop new insights and skills as we answer the following questions:

- What is the difference between good and exceptional service?
- What makes most U.S. customers unhappy?
- What is the impact of nonverbal, voice tone, verbal and listening abilities?
- How do you deal with angry or difficult customers?
- What about internal customers?

workshop calendar

June 5 • 10 a.m. - 4 p.m.

WOMEN'S SELF DEFENSE

Tuition: \$125.00 per person
(Lunch and handouts provided)

New Hampshire Community Technical College
Pease Tradeport, Portsmouth

To register: Return form below, call, or email

June 17 • 9 a.m. - 4 p.m.

MANAGING DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS

Tuition: \$135.00 per person
(Lunch, workbook, and Difficult
Conversations text included)

New Hampshire Community Technical College

To register: Return form below, call, or email

July 15 • 9 a.m. - 4 p.m.

SERVICE EXCELLENCE

Tuition: \$135.00 per person
(Lunch and handouts included)

New Hampshire Community Technical College

To register: Return form below, call, or email

**Please register early.
All workshops have minimum and
maximum participant requirements.**

CUSTOMIZED PROGRAMS

The following are examples of programs designed for organizations. All trainings are tailored to meet specific goals and objectives. Please call for additional information.

CORPORATE/BUSINESS SEMINARS

- Conflict in the Workplace
- The Difficult Business Conversation
Managerial Courage
- Creating a Positive Work Environment
- Team Building: Working Together Effectively
 - Powerful Presentations
- Difficult People: Tormentors or Teachers
 - Principled Negotiation

PROGRAMS FOR EDUCATORS

- The Magic of Conflict
- Violence: Dealing with Anger (for students)
- Helping Students Deal with Anger and
Conflict (for teachers)
- Team Building: Working Together Effectively

registration

Please reserve space for me in your upcoming workshop:

Title of Workshop: _____

Total Cost: _____ Deposit enclosed: _____ (minimum \$50)*

Name: _____ Occupation: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Phone (day): _____ (night): _____

E-mail: _____ Fax: _____

*Full deposit refundable one week prior to workshop date.

Please tell me!

If you prefer to receive *Power & Presence* electronically, let me know:

- By phone 603-431-8560
- By email Judy@JudyRinger.com
- Online at JudyRinger.com on the Contact page.

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- **Wearing the Hakama: Lessons in Leadership**
 - Real Life
 - Aikido Beginner's Class
 - Women's Self Defense
 - Service Excellence
- **Managing Difficult Conversations**

Be what you would wish to seem. ~Socrates

quotables

- *I now have specific strategies for addressing situations that have been very difficult for me.*
- *Your program deals with the aspect that most sessions on conflict don't deal with --how you effect change in yourself.*
- *This was very relevant as conflict occurs on a regular basis in the workplace.*
- *Very engaging, interactive, practical applications.*

solutions

question

I'm frustrated by my new assistant's inability to complete assignments to my standards. She just doesn't get it.

answer

Start with yourself, knowing that you have the right to want things the way you want them. When giving direction, be specific about details, and don't assume that she understands. Ask her to repeat what she thinks you've said. If work is not done correctly, find something that you appreciate, and be clear about what needs to be done differently. Notice my use of words – not "wrong," but "different." For example, "Jamie, thank you for scheduling the director's appointments while I was gone. I appreciate that he got to all his meetings on time. However, after you used my calendar, I found I couldn't locate some important appointments that I know were there. Can you show me what you did when you were handling the calendar?" (Watch, listen, and see what she did.) Then, "Next time, I'd like you to do it this way . . ."

By being detailed, specific and patient in your instruction, you may find that you can give your assistant more responsibility, and that you will have more time for the tasks only you can do.



**Conflict Management
 Communication Skills
 Training & Facilitation**

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