



Aikido, Resistance, and Flawless Consulting

By Judy Ringer

The key to understanding the nature of resistance is to realize that resistance is a reaction to an emotional process taking place within the client. It is not a reflection of the conversation we are having with the client on an objective, logical, rational level.

- Peter Block, *Flawless Consulting*

If your heart is large enough to envelop your adversaries, you can see right through them and avoid their attacks. And once you envelop them, you will be able to guide them along a path indicated to you by heaven and earth.

- Morihei Ueshiba, *O Sensei*, Founder of Aikido

- “A half-day workshop is all we have time for. We have a business to run.”
- “We’ve tried everything. These two just don’t see eye-to-eye and never will.”
- “It’s difficult for the reps to take time out of the field.”
- “We’re different here. We need content. Nothing ‘touchy-feely.’”

Resistance comes in many forms. When a potential client calls to discuss training or coaching, for example, s/he often has concerns about the timing and nature of the intervention and doubts about whether it will succeed, regardless of how many referrals and endorsements come with it.

Since reading Peter Block's *Flawless Consulting: A Guide to Getting Your Expertise Used*, I've thought a great deal about the parallels with Aikido, the martial art I practice and teach. Each time I turned a page, it seemed I could see one of the author's ideas about resistance as a physical movement on the mat, the theories in the book and the pictures in my mind reinforcing each other.

Directly Expressing Resistance

People use the phrase "overcoming resistance" as though resistance or defensiveness were an adversary to be wrestled to the ground and subdued. "Overcoming resistance" would have you use data and logical arguments to win the point and convince the client. There is no way you can talk clients out of their resistance, because resistance is an emotional process. Behind the resistance are certain feelings. You cannot talk people out of how they are feeling.

- Peter Block, *Flawless Consulting*

Opponents confront us continually, but actually there is no opponent there.

- Morihei Ueshiba

Aikido is a twentieth century evolution of the martial arts, developed by a Japanese master of sword and open-hand combat, Morihei Ueshiba. Ueshiba died in 1969, and we are fortunate to have video footage of the art as he practiced it.

O Sensei, as Aikidoists call him, was a spiritually grounded warrior, who believed that the true *budo* (martial art) was love. His vision for Aikido was that it would help "human beings become one family."



Utilization of Energy

Perhaps the most characteristic feature of Aikido, the one that distinguishes it from other fighting arts, is **Utilization of Energy**. In Aikido, we don't resist attacks; we embrace them. The person being attacked (*Nage*, pronounced nah-gay) does not defend in the usual sense by blocking and striking back against the person offering the attack (*Uke*, pronounced ooh-kay).

Rather, *Nage* receives the attack as a gift. The punch, grab, or strike comes, and the Aikidoist thinks, "Ah! Thank you very much!" Of course, we don't normally think of an attack as a gift, and this is precisely what makes Aikido so dramatically new and different.

In Aikido, we embody this idea that "the attack is a gift of energy" by physically blending and uniting with the strike. *Nage* moves into *Uke*'s space, allowing the strike energy to flow

past. As the strike is fully expressed, it loses its power to harm, and *Nage* is in a strong position to influence and move *Uke*.

Aikido reminds me of the old cowboy movie with the runaway horse. The experienced rider jumps into the saddle and rides the horse for a while until he's able to direct the horse's energy. The attack is the horse. I jump on, unite with the flow of energy, and allow it to safely dissipate. Throughout this process, my goal is to neutralize the attack without harming the attacker.

Supporting the Opponent

In *Flawless Consulting*, Peter Block speaks of managing a client's resistance in much the same way that Aikidoists speak of managing the incoming energy of a physical attack. Specifically, he writes that our "skill in dealing with resistance" lies in our ability to identify it, view it as a natural process, and "support the client in expressing the resistance directly." In Aikido, *Nage* also supports *Uke* by transferring and redirecting power.

In general, whether in a consultant-client relationship or any relationship, when we support the direct expression of what we experience as resistance, things change. Without something to push against, the resistance dissolves and turns into energy we can use to further understand and solve the problem.

When we help the resistance get expressed, it diminishes and we are then working with a client who is ready and willing to learn and be influenced.

- Peter Block, *Flawless Consulting*

This is nothing less than verbal Aikido.

And Peter Block shows us exactly how to encourage the full expression of a client's resistance:

- Ask the client more about his or her concerns.
- Name the resistance.
- Be quiet and let the client fill the silence.
- Don't take it personally.

Again, these suggestions are good advice whether in or out of the corporate boardroom. When we help the client, coworker, friend or family member directly express their resistance and clear the emotion, we transform our own resistance and move into connection with the person, the problem, and our highest purpose.

I'm grateful to Peter Block for his books and teaching, and for reinforcing my vision of the value of Aikido in everyday life.

There are no contests in the Art of Peace. A true warrior is invincible because he or she contests with nothing.

– Morihei Ueshiba

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About the Author: Judy Ringer is the author of *Turn Enemies Into Allies: The Art of Peace in the Workplace*. She provides conflict and communication skills training based on mind/body principles from the martial art aikido, in which she holds a third-degree black belt. Employing best practice communication models, Judy brings to life key concepts such as self-management under pressure and appreciation of other viewpoints.

Judy is also the author of *Unlikely Teachers: Finding the Hidden Gifts in Daily Conflict*, and three CDs: *Managing Conflict in the Workplace*, *Simple Gifts: Making the Most of Life's Ki Moments*, and *This Little Light: The Gift of Christmas*, all of which can be found on her website [www. JudyRinger.com](http://www.JudyRinger.com), or Amazon.com.

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