

Leadership of the Spirit

Embodying Intuition Through Dialogue and Aikido

By Chris Thorsen and Richard Moon

"There is a vitality, a life force, an energy, a quickening, that is translated through you into action. And because there is only one of you in all time, this expression is unique and if you block it, it will never exist through any other medium and be lost.... You do not even have to believe in yourself or your work. You have to keep open and aware directly to the urges that activate you. Keep the channel open."

--Martha Graham

Several years ago an entrepreneurial executive and his leadership team created a bold vision to build a complex, nation-wide telecommunications system in record time. He declared this vision to the financial community and was met with considerable doubt.

Aikido enabled this leader to ground himself and value "not knowing" in an environment intense with the pressure for immediate answers. Dialogue, a way of open inquiry, provided the forum for creativity where he and his people generated the break-set ideas and innovative actions that proved their capability. They surpassed the original "impossible" commitments within a year and thus secured multi-billion dollar funding for their enterprise.

Our Path

For the past 30 years, we've been exploring the nature of intuitional leadership in high change corporate environments. As mastery coaches to executives we've had some wonderful opportunities over the years to help these leaders and their people generate breakthroughs in telecommunications, computer manufacturing, international sales, and the power utilities.

Our purpose is to empower leaders to transform themselves and thus lead today's quantum change by their own example. Our vision is to awaken the spirit of organizations so they can respond harmoniously to change and use its energy as a source of power, like a skilled sailor in shifting winds. This is Aikido, the way of harmony with life's energy, leadership of the spirit.

Over the years we've come to view ourselves as shepherds of corporate culture and stewards of the human spirit. Our charter of accountabilities with our primary customers reflects how we endeavor to fulfill these roles.

- Assure fulfillment of the executive team's business commitments
- Raise critical issues (assumptions) into the light.
- Maintain an open dialogue on the nature of the company's culture
- Coach the management group on personal and team mastery.
- Generate breakthroughs by mediating conflicts on request and facilitating fun team retreats in nature.

Our Approach

Our primary vehicles for this exploration have been David Bohm's group Dialogue for deep listening and creative collaboration and Morihei Ueshiba Osensei's Aikido for personal and relational mastery. Both these extraordinary arts generate the high flexibility and deep heartedness required for mastering change.

Dialogue

"Dialogue has indeed its basic order from the beginning, but nothing can be determined, the course is of the spirit, and some discover what they have to say only when they catch the call of the spirit."

--Martin Buber

Dialogue and Aikido are both arts of intuition and open inquiry. We define Dialogue as gathering to wonder together. We define Aikido as the way (Do) of harmonizing (Ai) with universal energy (Ki). We use Aikido to provide fun, slow motion experiences to embody dialogue principles. We use dialogue to provide an interactive arena for the verbal application of Aikido principles.

We introduce and develop Dialogue in three phases:

- I Induction: Focus the Attention: Center
Gather the group together in a circle. Acknowledge the people as a council. Draw a distinction between *discussion for advocacy and closure* and *dialogue for inquiry and diversity*. Provide a few facilitation guidelines. Be present. Posit a focus for inquiry . . . or not.
- II Inquiry: Recognition of Attraction: Collaborate
Open wonder, discover key questions, allow diverse points of view, reveal and challenge assumptions, explore together where the known meets the unknown.
- III Relevation: Elevate What's Relevant: Share
Sense for wholeness, listen intuitively for the unfolding current of meaning (the whisperings), receive guidance from deeper self, express creativity, speak to the whole group, listen for the leadership of consensus.

Dialogue has never failed to generate either the significant questions or the innovative answers required by the creative teams with which we've worked. Dialogue is ideal for surfacing assumptions about what is *mission critical* to an organization. We simply configure the group in a circle and ask each person to speak in turn (or pass). We do rounds to define, select and analyze issues. Then we do a round or two on possible solutions during which the natural consensus reveals itself.

Aikido

"Aikido is not to fight with or defeat the enemy. It is the way to reconcile the world and make humans one family."
- Morihei Ueshiba Osensei

Aikido is a radical martial art. Also known as the Art of Peace, its unique purpose is to protect one's attacker from harm. When practicing we first center ourselves for increased presence. When our partner attacks, we don't resist, we blend with their force and lead the energy of conflict into a loving resolution. Applied to executive coaching, Aikido provides us with an experiential embodiment of intuitional awareness. Through simple, fun, gentle exercises leaders discover how to source the energy required for inspired leadership.

We introduce and develop Aikido through the same three phases:

- I Induction: Feel Where You Are: Breathe Center the mind, body and spirit; relax; experience the felt sense of your body's energy flow (Ki), extend your awareness 360° into your environment.
- II Inquiry: Non-Resistant Relationship: Blend
Open wonder, join (Ai) with the power of change; harmonious connection/attraction; join energies collaboratively; gain jurisdiction to lead; mutual empowerment/win-win.
- III Revelation: Share Who You Are: Lead
Sense for wholeness; listen intuitively for the unfolding current of action (Do); receive guidance about what's needed in the moment; express your creativity; lead change.

Aikido integrates mind, body and spirit into harmonious relationship and inspired action. Because the art is physical it serves as an especially powerful learning metaphor for highly intellectual corporate environments. Whether applying it to the coaching of individual leaders or in the development of collegiality on their teams, Aikido has demonstrated its power as a dynamic, slow motion, kinetic learning methodology. By practicing its principles leaders come to a fully embodied understanding of the principles of soft power and true servant leadership.

Whenever we use Dialogue and Aikido together, an intuitional connection occurs, the group is naturally led into communion with spirit and new meaning is discovered.

Our Experiences

Leadership Coaching We blend Aikido and Dialogue to deepen each client's connection with their inner voice, the instinctual guidance so important to leaders in the midst of today's quantum change. We coach them to develop the inner mastery that produces inspired leadership as a living presence. With this ability a leader need not know what to do. An intuitional leader sits quietly at the center of the cyclone of complex business pressures and facilitates creative inquiry through generative dialogue with his or her people.

One organization whose spirit has been awakened by its leader is a world class project management company in international construction. Providing turnkey teams that manage the construction of electronics systems, this company has been consistently breaking industry records since its inception. Aikido helped the owner conduct the crucial financial negotiations which started the company in 1985. The art helped him develop his innate, intuitive, non-confrontational negotiation style. Its principles have since become integrated into his company's culture through Dialogues and special Mastery Trainings. So meaningful have these principles become that each of his company's new employees is given a copy of The Way of Life by Lao Tzu, the ancient Taoist classic whose water course way is one with Aikido.

Team Feedback In executive team development it inevitably comes time for members to reveal more of the truth than is normally comfortable. From the Aikido point of view their underlying fear is actually the harbinger of power. We show them how to free up their energy by relaxing, opening and flowing with change. When Aikido Centering is combined with Dialogue, it enables team members to safely share the vital information that all too often goes uncommunicated for fear of misunderstanding or reprisal. In this way teams learn a safe way to reveal the truth and set their power free.

This approach also enables members of executive groups to coach each other. When we Dialogue we collapse the hierarchy and declare confidentiality and amnesty for all that is said. The Dialogue circle creates a non-threatening environment in which accusations and indictments are transformed into direct requests for behavioral change. This results in either an action commitment or a clear decline. Either way clarity is increased.

Multi Company Collaboration One of our telecommunications projects involves a half dozen companies who are establishing a new nationwide wireless communication system over the next two years. We use Dialogue and Aikido with key cross-functional project teams representing all the companies. These arts serve particularly well in bringing unity to their direction, bonding their hearts, clarifying their interdependencies and enabling them to work flexibly together.

In summary, we use Aikido and Dialogue to intuitively sense the energy of an organization and encourage its natural flow. Our role is to help people tune their personal and relational energies (Aikido) so they can tune the energies of their teams (Dialogue) and generate the power of organizational synergy.

Our Learnings

"I'm suggesting that there is the possibility for a transformation of the nature of consciousness, both individually and collectively, and that whether this can be solved culturally and socially depends on Dialogue. That's what we are exploring."

--David Bohm

When we combine Aikido with Dialogue, we bring about a powerful embodiment of deep intuitional learning. Whether dealing with a surprise physical attack or the surprise changes of our current business world . Albert Einstein said, *"No problem can be solved from the same consciousness that created it. We must learn to see the world anew."* Aikido and Dialogue help us shift into deeper, clearer consciousness. The Indians say that breath is the doorway to the spirit, just so is *centered presence* the doorway to intuitional awareness.

In our Dialogues, we often share an Aikido breathing exercise and sit in silence. We've learned that the deeper the presence, the deeper the intuitional connection. The deeper the intuitional connection, the deeper the relational connection. The deeper the relational connection, the deeper the Dialogue. Ultimately it's one's ability to shift into a deeper state of being that creates the opening for intuitional learning and inspired leadership.

We've found that the inner mastery practices of Aikido provide individuals with the ability to center into their own body presence and thus tap into intuitional seeing. In a like manner, the communication practices of Dialogue provide us with a powerful way to inquire openly into the unknown and thus tap into the

wellspring of our deeper creative intelligence. It is this ability to tap into spirit, to come from our deepest essence, our very source, that enables us to see the world anew.

Our Future

Our challenge in the next few years will be to go beyond coaching leading edge business leaders and experiment with new applications in other fields. Current pilot projects include mastery training for mediators of an international peacemaking organization; leadership training for managers of an old line, urban utility committed to a more flexible, entrepreneurial culture and an anti-violence program for a multi-cultural high school.

Opening Hearts One of the most powerful uses we've made of our approach has been to hold open Dialogue evenings during our retreats. Without any other agenda than simply sharing from the heart, people naturally reveal what's important to them personally and thus the team learns the essential knowledge of what's common between them as well as the uniqueness of each individual. Speaking from the heart empowers people to make a deeper connection to spirit and thus to speak their truth more securely.

I'm reminded of an evening in Germany a few years ago when the members of a crack American project team and their spouses came together from around that country to address the issues of cultural assimilation and personal life balance. During the evening many of us sat circled around an outdoor fireplace for Dialogue. We asked people why they had come to the company and for the next several hours we all shared our future visions and our fears. By the evening's end people were sharing their deepest views of life and death. But most important of all were the long periods of silence when we were satisfied to simply be together and watch the fire.

*This fire of sticks
darkens the night even more . . .
deepening our silence.*

