

Foreword

By Wendy Palmer, 5th degree Aikido Black Belt

During the many years I have been practicing the Japanese martial art of Aikido, I have often thought of the connection between the challenges Aikido practitioners work with on the mat and the challenges that arise in the world of organizations. Both situations offer an opportunity to learn about and refine how we operate under pressure. Both situations allow us to discover our strengths and our weaknesses. And, if we have the courage, we can use the victories and defeats that we experience to strengthen our commitment and deepen our knowledge.

Leadership is at once obvious and mysterious. Like Aikido, leadership is a mind-body-spirit discipline calling us to create conditions that allow others to contribute effectively and whole-heartedly. From childhood to old age, leadership is a function that touches all of our lives, offering endless opportunities to refine our capacity to lead and be led.

When the phrase “black belt” and leadership are brought together in the same sentence, notions of strength, confidence and focus are conjured up. These are the more obvious aspects of leadership, and in our Aikido practice, we spend time on exercises that develop focus, confidence and strength. Yet the more mysterious sides of martial arts and leadership involve the study of our internal experience, primarily our emotions. Emotions are rarely spoken about or utilized as a comprehensive aspect of the training. As Tim explains, “By...continuing to believe that emotions do not belong in organizations, leaders are allowing a goldmine to slip right through their fingers.”

Emotions are a goldmine because emotions are full of energy. As Tim also tells us, “Emotional change must begin with you, the leader,” and, “Everyone experiences emotions everyday, and despite this fact, few leaders

are formally trained in how to deal with people's emotions." I invite you to use the processes described in this book to inform your understanding of your emotional patterns, which will ultimately empower your capacity as a leader.

In his chapter on *Deep Knowledge*, Tim suggests that the first step for leaders is to "know yourself," and this book offers some highly useful guidelines on how to walk the mysterious path on the way to self-knowledge. Tim brings together more than concepts and exercises. He invites the reader to consider leadership as a holistic approach to life. He affirms that, as leaders travel the path to becoming *better* leaders, they will benefit by having a coach or mentor who can give support along with clear and honest feedback. I have practiced Aikido for more than thirty years, and I know that without my teachers, who were also my coaches, I would not have been able to develop the depth and understanding that I now endeavor to pass on to the students in my school.

This book is full of gems for you to explore, from the wisdom of learning how to handle emotions, to working with conflict and yin power. In this book, Tim leads you through a process of self-inquiry and empowerment. As you read, you will be able to appreciate what you already know while acknowledging aspects of leadership that may not be familiar or part of your strengths yet.

Those of you who like stories are in for a treat, for there is a wonderful collection within this book. Most of these vignettes tell of situations that may have occurred centuries ago, and yet the lessons are still applicable in our daily challenges of leadership.

As I read this book myself, I began to understand how Tim's background in psychology and Aikido lends a depth and grounding to the processes he puts forward. Since leadership covers a wide range of experiences, the capacity for self-knowledge and confidence are keys that unlock the door to a more fulfilling leadership experience. In Tim's words, "Black Belt Leadership is about basic respect, being sincere about who you are, and allowing and encouraging other people to be fully who they are."

Leading People the Black Belt Way gives you an opportunity to find out who you are and how you can contribute to a more fulfilling experience of leadership—both for you and for the people you are leading.

I'm confident you will enjoy the reading experience ahead of you as much as I did.

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