

Aikido

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

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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 very 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 very effective strategies for getting what they want. Since they have been using these strategies for a long time they are well practiced in how to implement them.

One of the characteristics of the abuser’s unique psychological profile is their compelling drive to win. Abusers perceive the world to be a very 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 their 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 Aikidoist 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. It is the tale 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 lead to his attaining high recognition for his abilities. It was this recognition that lead 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 2 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 he prepare tea for him. Understanding that this would likely be the last time he ever performed his beloved ceremony, he 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 any 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 knew 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 their time being uke and half being nage. Playing the role of uke is not entirely a selfless act, for in the dojo 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 an in depth 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 own 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 targets social standing: excluding, rejecting, isolating, public humiliation, rumor spreading.
- **Safety Violations**- Acts that threaten the targets 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. Abuse's 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 are 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. What abusers do is 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, only 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 which assure that you fail the interview. Failing to recognize 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: Does this person have the will and ability to defend themselves, and will this person do a good job filling the basic needs that the abuser is attempting to satisfy? For example, the Tea Master passed the interview because his lack of martial arts training made him seem like someone who would be easy to defeat, and his high rank made beating him a valuable prize. To make sure you don't become the target of abuse you simply need to make sure that the abuser answers the first question with a resounding "YES," and the second with an unequivocal "NO."

It is rare that an abuser will attempt to pick on a worthy opponent. Why would they take the risk of confronting an individual who is willing and able to defend themselves, when there are so many people who aren't. Abusers want easy targets and that means individuals who they perceive to be less powerful. A significant power differential between the abuser and his target is a consistent pattern of abusive situations.

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 this it is helpful if you understand the three intrinsic elements of all conflict negotiation: positions, issues, and interests.

Issues are *what* is being negotiated. Positions are strategies for *how* you would like to resolve an issue. The driving force behind the issues and positions are interests. Interests are the motivating *why* that transcends all relationships and actions. 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 re-enforce 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 re-enforces 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 an evolutionary legacy we all bear. They draw a comparison between humans and mature male chimpanzees, our closest genetic relative, who spend the vast majority of their time and resources competing for increased social status.

The motivations behind abuse fit remarkably well with this model of understanding. Abusers seek increased status through demonstrating dominance over another individual. What this does in the peer group that witnesses this behavior is create the fear that the abuser will turn his attentions on 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.

In all negotiations the interests 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. Most often the best strategy is to acknowledge the bully's substantive issue with the 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 real 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. This position is founded on the abuser's competitive belief that for him to win the abuse target must lose.

Bully Samurai

interest- self-esteem, social esteem

substantive issue- the issue he created

relationship issue- his need the create an abuser/victim relat.

position- the Tea Master must be his victim

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. The two opposing schools of thought are nature, holding that aggression is part of the human biological makeup, and nurture, holding that aggression is the result of learned behavioral patterns. The current opinion 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 etched in the genes, it is the environmental factors, including nurture, that determines when, where, and how it manifests itself. In other words, for healthy individuals, the capacity for violence is an inherent trait that is kept in check by other inherent traits designed to keep it from manifesting at inappropriate times, places, or situations. For these

individuals it takes the right 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.

One of the most significant limiters on aggression is the ability to empathize with another. Empathy is a normal and important social ability that typically does not develop fully until around ages 8 or 9. Prior to this, children have little ability to put themselves in another's place. What is sometimes seen as mean behavior in young children, calling another child names for example, is in actuality a normal reflection of this inability for empathy.

Abusers for some reason do not develop this ability. This leaves them untroubled by the pain and suffering they inflict on their victims long after their peers are able to empathize with others. This lack of empathy probably contributes to the lack of guilt 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 abuse position 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. Others are viewed as either on their team, on the other 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.

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

Bullying among kids provides a nice 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 give it to them.

Who made this rule and who is the sole benefactor of it? The bully is of course. Studies tell

us that 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 abuse situation. Bullies know that if the abuse target won't seek help in fear of violating the bully ethic, their ability to prevent the abuse will be severely handicapped.

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. Say someone cuts them off while driving. They don't see this as an accident, they see it as a call to arms. 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.

Abusers use this strategy because it works for them. 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. They then apply these lessons to other areas of their lives where it works because in most social spheres they are able to zero in on at least one target whom they can get to play their game.

The target of abuse has very similar interests to the abuser with two exceptions. First, besides self-esteem and social status, a target of abuse also is concerned with safety interests. The other way the abuser and his target differ is that the abuser is trying to satisfy interests and the target is working to prevent his interests from being violated. These are very different perspectives.

Abuse Target

Interests- safety, self-esteem, social status

substantive issue- none, yet must acknowledge the abuser's relationship issue- the need to not be in an abusive relat.

Position- 5 possible meta-strategies of conflict negotiation

An important step in learning how to handle abusive people is to recognize that abuse is 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 the Aikido role play are substantive issues addressed. Aikido is solely focused on negotiating relationship issues. This is because Aikido training is an abuse scenario that is an example of a relationship that is so dysfunctional that negotiating substance is absurd.

For the targets of abusive behavior it is very common 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 you only have direct power over yourself. Don't naively believe that you have the power to change the abuser. What your power over yourself does is give you the ability to control the nature of the relationship you have with the abuser.

The abuser works very hard to establish the relationship of abuser/victim. To create this relationship abusers go to great lengths to find the right person to play the role of victim. The dictionary defines victim as "a person who suffers from a destructive or injurious action." 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 outstripped 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 Sandan (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 choice do you have? 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 since 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 perception, 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.

Meta-Strategies of Conflict Negotiation

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. 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 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. The problem with avoidance is that it is a no-win situation, meaning nobody loses but at the same time there is no possibility of success either. In life, success requires relationships. Since conflict is an inevitable part of relationship, if avoidance is the dominant strategy used when facing conflict, success in life will be impossible. Because avoidance means the relationship will end the moment a conflict arises, avoiders will usually end up lonely and unsuccessful.

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. Aikido training is based on the premise that you have no better choice than to face the abuser. Avoidance can be a good interim tactic, but much better long term resolution will be found through other 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 most relationship orientated strategy, and therefore 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 to survive and prosper all healthy relationships require give and take. 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 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. Since it is not, accommodating the abuser's position with integrity will involve seeing the situation from a higher perspective. This means recognizing the truth of the attacker's position and labeling it for what it is: an

abuse motivated attack. What this accommodation does is place 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 them by giving them 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 conflict strategy. Accommodation actually can work fine as long as the only other people you interact with are other accommodators. Of course the chances of that are zero. The problem comes when the person who has an accommodating life conflict strategy develops a relationship with a competitive individual. Competitive individuals thrive off of accommodators. The accommodator will end up satisfying the competitors needs at the expense of their 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 next look at responding to the abuser's competitive strategy with a competitive strategy of your own.

Competition and Compromise

Competition is a very common strategy and there is no denying that it can also be very effective for satisfying interests. Competition is where a person 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.

What happens in the tournament ring of competitive martial arts offers a good example of what happens when two competitors of equal power meet. When the bell rings each competitor moves toward the other looking for weaknesses in the other's position. Usually they will begin testing the opponent's position until a true weakness is found, at which 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 will 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 the parties usually start by addressing the issues, but as they stake out their positions the focus shifts to trying to prove its superiority. At this point the negotiation becomes an ego based contest that usually ends in a compromise that leaves both party's interests poorly satisfied.

This is the natural result when the negotiators are focused on winning rather than success. In Principled Negotiation success means attaining a high degree of interest satisfaction. In winning all you need to do is beat the other party. This means you can easily win a contest without being successful.

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.

Compromise lives right between competition

1st party	2nd party	1st	2nd	total	type
compete	avoidance	1	0	1	zero-sum
compete	accommod.	1	0	1	zero-sum
accommod.	compete	0	1	1	zero-sum
compromise	compromise	1/2	1/2	1	zero-sum
collaborate	collaborate	1	1	2	synergetic

and accommodation in that both parties give on some interests and take on others. Compromise is usually the result when two competitive parties are in negotiation. The problem with compromise is that in many cases nobody experiences optimal satisfaction. Perhaps this is why most people dislike conflict so much.

Compromise is probably the most common result of a conflict between equals. 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 don't 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 the Bully Samurai knew this.

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 life conflict strategy is collaboration.

Collaboration is the strategy where 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 an 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. 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 out-compete the other party, 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 1/2 of the orange. This is better than no orange, but as you will see is not the optimal possible result.

In any negotiation the 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 interest satisfaction. It is common that through the collaborative process new solutions will be created that were not possible for each individual separately. The other thing that often happens is that the two parties will discover that many of their individual needs dovetail. These new solutions have the effect of synergetically increasing the size of the pie.

In the orange negotiation, by working to understand the other party's needs, you discover that they completely compliment each other. 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.

This negotiation shows an essential quality of collaboration; that the parties share equitably in the gains and losses that result. Yet 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 with one big difference. In collaboration the relationship has been improved and in competition the relationship has been damaged. From a short term perspective this might not matter, but 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 possible result, or worst. He would have preferred winning, but the Sword Master's strategy took that option away. When given the choice between both living or both dying, the Bully Samurai chose both living.

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. 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 to achieve 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 further from the truth.

This is because proper collaboration is nice, but not vulnerable. 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 its interest are not exploited. Without a powerful preventive side, a competitive other party will likely defect and 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 their 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 Kisshomaru'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 abuse target interview. 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.

Hugh Young 1/14/02

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Aiki Negotiation Guidelines

Preparation- Actions to take before ever entering into a negotiation.

- 1- Develop a general map of the territory of conflict resolution. If this article was successful you have already begun to do this.
- 2- Develop strong BATNAs (best alternative to a negotiated agreement).
- 3- Develop strong allies: friends, authority figures, the law, rules, the truth.

Opening Position- Get Centered in the Position of Greatest Integrity

- 4- Center your position- Balance power and virtue, effectiveness and ethics, hard and soft, results and relationship, your interests and theirs,
- 5- Center your perspectives- Take the highest practical perspective from which to solve real problems. Think long term, act now. Think universally, act specifically. Think objectively, act personally.
- 6 Center your strategy in collaboration. Unite the best of the results orientated competitive strategy with the relationship orientated accommodation strategy.

Negotiation Specific Planning- Step Into the Position of Greatest Power

- 7- Develop a useful and clear map of this specific conflict. Who is involved? What are the issues? Why are they issues? How do the other parties want to solve the issues? Create a compelling vision of success.
- 8- Stay committed to the Aiki collaborative strategy regardless of the other party's actions.
- 9- Be open and honest with your strategy and intentions. Unlike competition, Aiki Collaboration thrives on openness and honesty.
- 10- Take an equality attitude- don't be an aggressor and don't be a victim. Share equitably and appropriately in success or failure, gain or lose.
- 11- When possible, exercise your power to control the time and place of the negotiation. Do so for the purpose of creating equality.

Negotiate the Issues

- 12- Set clear and responsive boundaries that are appropriate to the relationship.
- 13- Be aware of what kind of issues are being negotiated; substantive or relationship. As much as possible keep the two separate.
- 14- Sidestep personal attacks. Avoid injury and reposition yourself where you have greater potential to resolve the conflict.
- 15- Acknowledge and accommodate the other party's positions and interests without sacrificing the integrity of yours.
- 16- Focus on improving your position instead of changing theirs. Use the integrity of your position to influence the other party. Don't force resolution.
- 17- Root your power in tension- Use lots of questions and great listening to draw information from the other party that can lead to understanding and resolution.
- 18- Solve problems, not people. Seek creative solutions to issues that "expand the pie" and get interests to dovetail. When interests compete base the solutions on objective standards.

Reach Resolution

- 19- Patiently wait until the moment is right and then take decisive action. "Uke will tell you the solution." Get the other party invested in the solution by giving them a part in creating it.
- 20- Be forgiving, demand justice but then forgive and move on.

Aikido

and

The Art of Resolving Conflict With an Abusive Individual

Hugh Young

Presented at the American Bar Association Section of
Dispute Resolution Fourth Annual Spring Conference

April 6, 2002

Session: Aikido and The Art of Principled Negotiation

#E5 Saturday 9:00 to 10:30 AM