

Sword and Spirit

The eJournal of Itten Dojo

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— Why Budo? —

Regardless of the times in which you live, or the circumstances of your life, success largely depends on things you can control:

- **Building a foundation of strong relationships in a community of mutual support and achievement.**
- **Forging a disciplined and positive mindset.**
- **Enhancing your physical health and capabilities.**

These are exactly the benefits membership in a dojo provides.

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Shinrai (信頼) Principles of Trust

Several aspects of expressing gratitude, discipline, and perseverance are essential to benefitting and growing from the dojo culture experience. Let me help you resonate an understanding.

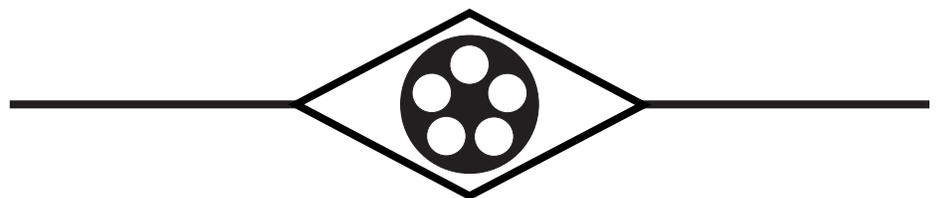
Many times, *deshi* (students; disciples) cheat themselves of the deepest physical, emotional, and intellectual developments. The reason is they carry, cultivate, and hold on to fears and anxieties in their *keiko* (稽古; training)—in fact, during their entire journey. What makes this happen? It is by their own design, I tell you. Listen up...

Many, if not most, design their martial journey around placating their fears and anxieties, rather than addressing them—but this must happen, overtly and in less obvious ways. Healthy processes are the key. *Keiko* must push those mental and emotional buttons that you hide so well. Do not think that the efforts to avoid *tanren* (forging) as a lifestyle aren't obvious to the discerning eye. Many students pick and choose what they “think” will benefit them but often miss out on much depth that “could have been” presented. Sometimes this is a matter of ego, narcissism, extreme fear/duress, or mistrust of the plan, curriculum/teacher, etc.

The *deshi* develops a preconceived plan to avoid addressing those scary inner demons, issues, and fears. They develop comfort zones, especially emotionally. I have watched *deshi* spin like tops for years, always ending up with a dizzying array of frustrations and self-imposed setbacks.

Trust the Process

A teacher must be able to present convincingly, time after time, year after year, a method that is powerful, intellectually challenging, quite pragmatic, and that has a means of *jikiden* (direct transmission) to work also on the other forms of self-preservation, the mind, and emotions—these are organically connected aspects of the self. I have seen too many sound, martial technicians still carrying the same fears and concerns as before they began training.



This is not productive. Signposts along the way must have been missed. So, how do we remedy this? Thanks for asking; I do have a few ideas.

For much of the history of my organization, we have been a small, dedicated group. People have come and gone. Often, we had groups of fighters, Close Quarter Combat (CQC) crowds, and other roughnecks in our group. Refined roughnecks, but the same in any regard. Our classes were often housed in boxing and judo centers. This cultivated the perfect technical lab, but as far as building for the future, that was not the plan at that point. I had a few students studying the *kyōka* (formal curriculum) but mostly, honestly, I was just happy to have very good fighters to work with and test against. What we lacked, were enough members that wanted the full picture.

A while back, I organized my notes and decided to share it all. I used to demo it, fight with it, and teach with it. I was not, however, teaching the *kyōka* widely. Trust and a sense of *giri* (obligation) are a must. Our current group is doing wonderfully in uniting, bonding, and sharing. This will transfer and mold into *keiko*. Our *bukiho* (weapons methods) are quite dangerous. Far from tournament folly, these can hurt or kill a person or persons. It behooves us to initiate specific processes for socializing, discussing, etc.



Trust can be developed on the tatami and off—a circle of trust, so to speak. Listen, we use real weapons at close distances. We must move beyond fear, distraction, and twitch reactions, and many of those are triggered by emotional voids, gaps, and denials. *Keiko*, if seen as true training for self-preservation, must include the preservation of the mind and emotions. Why do people fall into perversions, dangerous relationships, and other pitfalls in life? A lack of knowledge of self and the forging of one's efforts into a unified study.

Here are some ways we've used, to develop the requisite trust among the members of our own martial arts organization:

1. Establish a calendar of events to observe and study various cultural aspects from traditional Japan. This can include a recognition of a particular activity, a demo or seminar, and then a fine meal. This is cultural in nature, not religious.
2. Follow established protocols of *reigi saho* (etiquette and manners) in order to understand how to move, turn, walk, and rise/sit with any and all weapons. Beyond mere formality, this is safety itself!
3. Understand an emotionally healthy expression of the *sempai/kohai* (senior/junior) relationship. There is much to learn here, and this is a great example of *In Yo* (陰陽) in human relationships. Many people fear closeness and intimacy with others. In an art that stresses such interactions, it is silly not to address that part of oneself. It is not servitude, slavery, or abusive—unless one allows it to become such. The egocentric self often wants to define such relationships as something negative, but this is not the case in an emotionally healthy dojo.
4. Give 100% to every effort in the dojo. Practice a ceaseless awareness (*zanshin*, 残心). Each step, every turn—in fact, each action and thought. There is so much more within these actions, often containing keys that you are searching for. Often missed, the *kaizen* (improvement) can't be realized because the *deshi* gets in his or her own way. Be aware of spacing, time, action, and response.



Keep a detailed training journal! Note what you see and feel, as well as your frustrations. Note it all. Pay attention to words and actions in the dojo. Sensei is supposed to press buttons, cause confusion, and test your awareness.

5. Dojo cleaning and chores are the duty of all. *You are not a customer!* A traditional dojo does not see you as such and members of the dojo will not permit you to treat the dojo in such a regard. *Giri* (義理), or obligation, is something good for us all. We must keep the dojo spotless, at all times.

6. Communicate often with others in your group. How about welcoming new members? Try to arrange cross-training with others outside your immediate group—freely and openly. In short, be a *keiko-kai*; train but also socialize.

7. Support dojo projects. This should be a no-brainer. The projects benefit all but please consider that you can also benefit personally if you jump in. Just jump in. (Many that might have been fence-sitters for years may also be the ones with technical and developmental frustrations.)

8. *Dojocho* (owners; chief instructors): Protect your dojo. We can alleviate some of the trepidations potential members might have if we are licensed, insured, and a proper business entity. Trademarks are a must.

9. Students: Invest in yourselves. Purchase a proper *keikogi* (uniform), practice weapons, and study materials. Invest in you. Invest in looking and feeling great.

10. Attend the national seminars and/or any other opportunities to train with the senior instructors of your

organization. Get on a plane, train, or automobile. One can't learn these arts by osmosis at a distance. Host an event (earn while you learn), or start a study group (it works).

11. Verbally encourage others in your group.

12. Tell the group about yourself—that helps to develop trust. In *keiko*, one's character and manners can be discerned. We must know one another, on some level. (You are not getting a live blade near me, if I haven't vetted you.)

13. Be there for one another. Care about more than just fighting. I started as a young child, so training hasn't been about the fear of violence for me for some time. There are deeper developments to be had. One is compassion. If a member is struggling and reaches out, hear them out. At least remain polite. Perhaps there is a challenge or lesson in there for you. Get out of your own way. Help a member that has questions.

14. Have realistic expectations. You needn't be a barnstormer or fighter but have a serious focus and intention when training. Take the *kyoka* as a set of processes.

15. *Most of all, enjoy keiko! If it isn't bringing some joy into your day/life, what are you doing here?*

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Read this and consider it. How can it change your perspective, processes, or attitude towards *keiko* and essentially, one another? 

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