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Tim Warneka takes martial arts principles into the office.



## The Black Belt Way

**A**fter practicing the Japanese martial art Aikido for the past 15 years, Lakeland Community College counselor Tim Warneka is not the sort of guy with whom you'd want to tangle. But instead of fighting, Warneka has chosen to use the harmonious aspects of the martial arts to start a consulting firm that teaches business professionals how to be more effective leaders. In anticipation of this month's release of his book, "Leading People the Black Belt Way: Conquering the Five Core Problems Facing Leaders Today," Warneka shared a handful of Aikido principles that can help you become sensei of your office. — *Liz Logan*

**1. Don't push or pull people:** If pushed, humans are hard-wired to push back, says Warneka. Aikido rewires people not to push back, but to engage the other person in a non-violent way. In the office, this means listening to what a person is saying and accepting

their feelings, not telling them they're wrong.

**2. Turn your attention to your body and breathe:** "When we are under stress or in conflict, we stop breathing or we breathe very shallowly," says Warneka. "That's exactly the opposite of what we need in stressful situations." Just as you would when practicing Aikido, take a deep breath and use your breath to support yourself in tense situations.

**3. Value relationships:** "In Aikido, there are no tournaments, there are no competitions, there's none of that," says Warneka. "Whenever you are practicing with somebody, you are practicing with a partner, not working against an opponent." So when working on a project with co-workers, think of them as partners and treat them with respect and dignity.

**4. Honor and respect emotions:** Warneka says recent neurological research has

shown that emotions underlie every thought we have, so it is impossible to keep them out of the workplace. Instead of trying to suppress emotions, recognize they are present and respond to them. "Aikido recognizes that what is present is present," explains Warneka. "It's paying attention to what's happening in the moment, apart from what I think should be happening in the moment or what I want to be happening in the moment."

**5. Recognize work relationships are a process:** Don't look at yourself and your co-workers as experts or amateurs, but as lifelong learners. "When Americans think about martial arts, they think about belts," says Warneka. "In traditional Asian society, there's really not this focus. ... There's always more to learn, there's always ways to grow, there's always skills to sharpen."

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