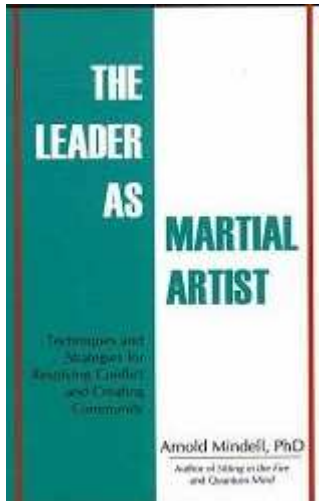


The Leader as Martial Artist- Techniques and Strategies for Resolving Conflict and Creating Community

By Arnold Mindell, PhD. Lao Te Press Lt, USA



Reviewed by Anne Rød, December 2009

This book gives an insight on how to work with groups and communities to resolve conflicts, which can stem from the different “ism”s, one of which is racism and cultural clashes.

The book takes us through four parts titled:

- Theory and Methods
- The Metaskills of Leadership
- Global Work
- The Possible Universe

The book introduces a way of approaching people from other backgrounds than your own and to read the signals that are expressed, how to be curious about them rather than judge and interpret. How to be curious about other perspectives and open to influence? The underlying theme is that we are all responsible for our universal system and the totality of our community and societies in which we live and operate. It is relevant to ask how Mindell`s approach to culture can be combined with the 5-D model. He outlines ways of working with culture that require people to overcome some of their own mental and cultural programming to see the larger picture. We know that awareness increases understanding,

and this book introduces ways to magnify our levels of awareness at new levels of detail, and that we are all signals in the world at large, revealing what is going on in our own systems, cultural and others.

Strengths and weaknesses:

This is not your traditional book on culture and its audience would be people facilitating change processes and conflict resolution where cultural differences may be the source of tension. It is written in academic style with a lot of jargon and requires some familiarity with group processes, psychology in addition to an open mind. The author writes in a reflective mode and to an audience who familiar with or open to his approach or work. For an open-minded reader it does introduce a series of interesting concepts, which can be transferred to use in cultural settings. The content of the book is highly relevant and applicable, however it is written with a high “kumbaya” factor which makes it a bit too far fetched for some. It is not your practical skills book, but rather a way to be inspired to look at awareness in a different way.

Relation to culture:

Mindell take us through many ways of exploring our awareness and by doing so we increase our ability for understanding culture. The message is to know your own culture and personal system, and be comfortable with it. And to be curious about the others you meet. He introduces some concepts that are very relevant for working with cultures. Here are some examples:

- Time spirits that live in our culture and influences our beliefs, attitudes and behaviours. A time spirit is a ghost from a past time that still feels present. It can be a war, a leader or in cultural traditions. This can be interpreted in a practical way through i.e. the German expression of “ordnung musst sein” to avoid uncertainty. Why do we need order, where does it come from, what is the cultural ghost or time spirit that stipulates this? By understanding this we can empathise and interact in a different way.
- In any cultural setting it is interesting to ask; what are the time spirits at work in this situation now and how are they influencing us? What is trying to happen, wanting to unfold? And how can it increase our sensitivity and awareness?
- World work begins to deal with the outer realities such as cultural differences by looking at our inner process and experience of it. Inner work pieces can be related to understanding the culture within yourself and others. He links it to our identity.

- He also introduces a concept called rank and revenge-which can be related to the Power Distance Index dimension of Hofstede. People in high positions will use, and abuse, their rank, and there may be revenge at some point in some way.

The challenge is that world work processes with maximum awareness can only succeed with democratic procedures. And according to Hofstede`s work most of us live in societies where democratic processes are not in operation. So is this possible, or just a naïve approach for a few? Is this possible and even more relevant – it is sustainable?

About the author:

***Arny Mindell** developed process work or what is called today, “process oriented psychology” (p.o.p.), in the mid 1970's after having studied with Carl Jung. By the 1990's, he expanded process work to include quantum theory and a deeper form of democracy that applied to all states of consciousness. Now process work could be used in individual therapy and coma work, large group and organizational change management.*

Together with their friends, Amy and Arny Mindell are co-founders of the original school of process-oriented psychology in Zurich, Switzerland in the early 1980's. Today, Amy and Arny consult and work as facilitators on community and conflict problems for groups, cities and governments worldwide. They teach process work, give personal therapy and classes in their home city of Portland, Oregon, USA and teach in many places around the world. Mindell has developed the concept of “world work” which are large group processes aimed at resolving conflicts. He has taken this methodology all over the world working in conflict areas such as Israel, South- Africa and Russia, to name but a few.