

Hitting is Not Striking

Miyamoto Musashi (1585-1612) is not only Japan's best known Samurai, but his classic martial arts masterpiece *The Book of Five Rings*, is also frequently studied for hints on business strategy.

Within the text there is a passage that cautions that, *hitting is not the same thing as striking*.

Many people assume that the result (hitting) is an indication of ability to perform (striking). However, in many cases the result such as succeeding in business, may be a very temporary phenomenon, having more to do with circumstances than with ability.

The current financial crisis triggered by the disastrous effects of the subprime mortgage system has brought many apparently successful companies to their knees.

In Musashi's terms, the success that they had previously enjoyed was fleeting, because it was based on circumstances or luck, rather than ability. This is why they lost control so easily when the circumstances changed.

The keys to *striking* are practice and intentionality. In the martial arts this is done by the continuous practice of *kata*, or forms. In business, it is done by the continuous refinement of best practices.

This is covered in more detail in my chapter entitled, *The Small Fish Swallows the Big Fish*, published in the recent bestseller, *Guerrilla Marketing on the Front Lines*.



Sakana (fish)

Musashi's *Five Rings* does reach around the world to teach Lessons of the martial arts: survive and thrive in the face Of superior strength, or standing at a disadvantaged place.

In the modern situation, we need the help of interpretation To apply the sage's wisdom; and so to metaphor we turn In order that his timeless lessons we can much better learn.

Born to this world as small fish, fearing to be another's dish, We dream, take on the challenge and set our mission, To apply his spirit to our study session.

Book of Fire shows use of swords, but no certain victory awards By merely holding it in front; and that victory also may be won; With empty hand - no weapon - may success still come.

The sword compared to minted coin, the same lesson we purloin; Money thrown into marketing gives no guarantee of gain, First invest in time, energy, imagination – it's plain.

In *The Ground*, Musashi says: study other weapons, other ways "to know the smallest things and the biggest things," he doth write "the shallowest things and the deepest things;" keep this in sight.

Build a better mousetrap, the world 'll come to you? The reverse is true; For a sales representative knocking at a prospect's door, Takes a score of visits, but years ago it was only four.

Too many options and demands, then *attention-deficit* commands; So many technical and lifestyle changes: our TV screens were alight With but a few stations; cable made it hundreds; the Internet, infinite.

Bombarded in a hundred way, even thousands of messages a day, Spawn products and services for shrinking attention spans so fast, Messages won't reach a captive audience; that's a thing of the past.

A coin dropped on the stony ground makes an intoxicating sound; All passersby turned to see, is there a chance of profit there? People notice what interests them, things for which they only care.

Miyamoto a master swordsman clear, indeed without a peer, His flair at brush and scroll, verse and tea is well known; To seek the warrior's way, depth and breadth of skill you must hone.

In *The Ring on Water*, we are told, in both daily life and fighting bold, The spirit is determined but calm; successful people don't move In hurried manner, nor speak in breathless tone – nothing to prove.

Seeming busy is not that state; truly busy – accomplishment is great; But never lose composure; a person who complains of life's pace, Achieves little for all the fuss, adds nought to the human race.

Small fish swallows big fish: the proverb's meaning you may cherish, Beyond logical sense, Zen points to a higher meaning, you will see; These simple words remind us: in a new dimension to think free.

We can become spirited enough to win, through thick and thin; We need to come back again and again to find a way that works; So it is that power can be found where perseverance lurks.

Verse by Hugh Purser