

SALES & MARKETING

Martial lore

Forget the fisticuffs. Winning over clients can be more an appropriate state of mind than a bitter battle, writes **Paul McIntyre**.

Ron Lee is a corporate ninja with a bent for selling. As testosterone-charged as it might appear at first, Lee's sales training using martial arts techniques – mostly to do with focusing the mind rather than kicks to the head – is lapped up by women.

Men, it seems, find it more challenging to deal with Lee's penchant for blending Eastern philosophy with Western selling techniques. But Lee does have some intriguing views and plenty of Australian companies are prepared to back his approach, including Telstra, St George Bank, KPMG, GlaxoSmithKline and Mortgage Choice.

Lee's primary point is that Western sales methods are usually about one side winning and the other bombing out. But for Westerners lacking knowledge about the way of the ninja, the win-lose scenario can sound pretty close to what martial arts and kung-fu fighting is all about. Chop, kick and pow to the head – or heart – of an opponent.

Not always so, Lee says. "In, say, Aikido training, there is no attack mechanism." The selling techniques of the West have themselves been rather aggressive.

"At a point in the 1970s, sales techniques started teaching the six

stages of selling: make the cold call, establish rapport, make the client aware of a need, create desire, provide a solution and close the deal. It used to be about, 'I want to win and you to lose'. The sales process has been fairly combative."

In Lee's East-meets-West world, outlined in his self-published book, *What Shintaro Taught Me*, things are not so abrasive. "It's commonly known as relationship selling," he says. "It's about using Eastern philosophy, such as Zen, in Australian management, Western management."

If you underestimate somebody else, you're not going to achieve what you want.

Lee says in his "Eastern-Western crossover" that the idea of customer or prospect "objection" in the sales process is not really there because the premise is about finding a solution.

And, as with a growing number of sales trainers and speakers, Lee's attention is as much about dealing with the inner world, thought processes and self-confidence as it is about the 331 techniques to get a sale.

In Lee's terminology it's energy

flow and focus – practical demonstrations include busting planks of wood and putting petite women up against big blokes in "push offs" to demonstrate Bruce Lee's adage that it's "not strength that matters, it's focus".

But it is here that Lee says that some men get a bit twitchy. "The people that make the most of this are those open to ideas they haven't heard before," he says. "A lot tend to be women because they know they can't overpower a man three times their size. It's not the strength, it's the focus."

Ron Lee

Focus and energy, that is. In Aikido, Lee says, the proponent only responds to an attacker, and uses that hostile "strength, power and size" for their own benefit.

In a sales context, Lee says he uses Aikido, the Japanese "Bushido" negotiating technique and ancient teachings on energy flows – Chinese call it "chi", Japanese say "ki" – to help people improve their effectiveness. Again, it is the intangible subject of energy flows which spook the men.

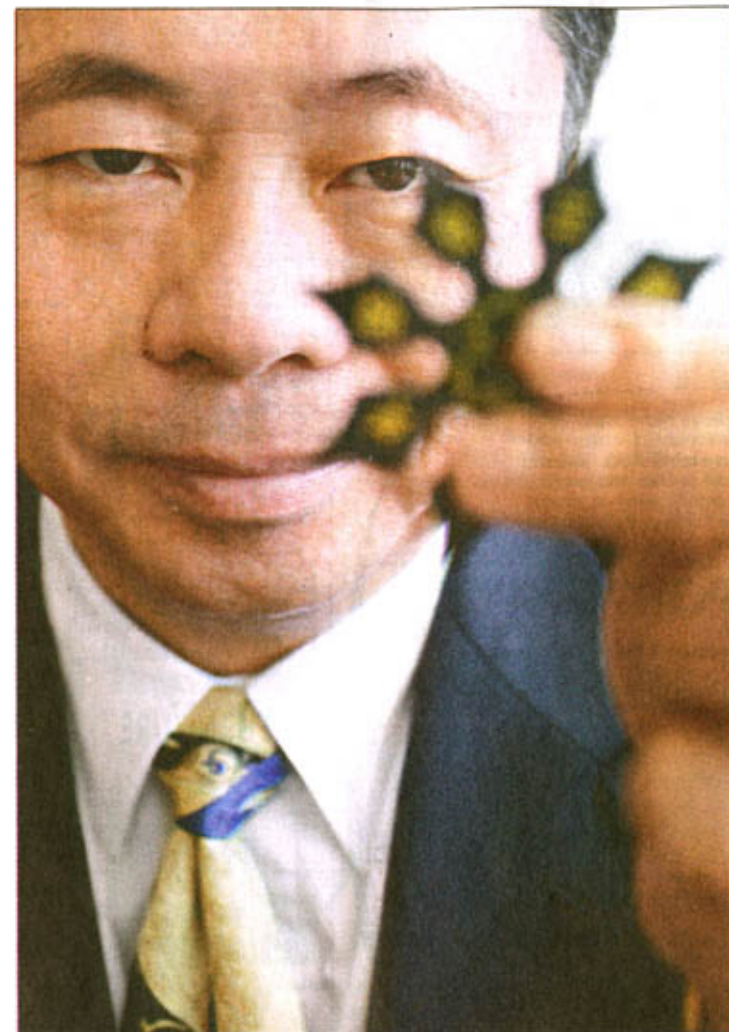
"You're talking quantum mechanics, physics – everything has a magnetic field and they all tend to a state of balance," Lee says.

But just how does this all really relate to selling stuff? "It's about overcoming any potential issue we have," he says. "It's basically getting what you want by removing barriers and focusing your intent on the objective. We help people empower themselves to be what they need to be, to do what they need to do."

"This martial arts approach to sales is almost effortless, whereas is if you are in a combative mode, if you want the debate or battle, you may not get the sale. It's basically a need, or problem-solving issue. People will buy for two reasons: the feeling of fear or the feeling of greed."

Lee says a crucial part of his training from the martial arts is to look "1000 miles into the distance" – in other words, to put the immediate challenge or objective into a long-term context, even if you think the person you're dealing with is a "knucklehead".

"The thing is that that person thinks they are coming from a valid place," says Lee. "They believe what they are saying is totally justified. If you're in a martial arts tournament or a pairing



Star quality ... East meets West thanks to Ron Lee.

Photo: Natalie Boog

session and you underestimate that person, even if they're a couple of belts below you, they're going to beat you. It's the same with sports teams. If you underestimate somebody else, you're not going to achieve what you want. If you have an absolute, genuine and sincere respect for

that person and realise they are making valid points then you have something to work with. Nothing will get done long-term without total respect for the other person."

More details on corporate ninja can be found at www.corporate-ninja.com