

Martial arts in business life

By [Julie Middleton](#)

He calls himself the corporate ninja and reckons martial arts philosophies will beat the competition. JULIE MIDDLETON reports.

This is not for the faint-hearted.

I'm standing facing Ron Lee, outstretched hands supporting an arrow whose metal-coated tip is poked into his neck.

By harnessing the power of his mind to prime the body, he says, he is going to walk forward and break it – snap a commercially available arrow, made to withstand 15kg, against his trachea.



Ron Lee demonstrates his skills by breaking an arrow held against his throat. Mind over matter, he says. Picture / David White

This guinea pig is not too keen on responsibility for GBH so early on a sunny Monday morning.

Lee, 49, Australian-born and of Chinese heritage, appears as calm as ... well, an extremely calm thing.

He takes a deep breath, closes his eyes for some very long seconds, leans into the arrow.

It snaps into three bits which arc into the air.

The pieces require a bit of effort and two hands to break.

So what's this got to do with climbing the corporate ladder? Everything, says Sydney-based Lee.

As martial arts philosophy and practice give students control and strength by teaching them to look beyond a problem to the solution, he says, so they give the ambitious in any corporate culture the tools to perform well beyond expectations.

Martial arts purists may cringe, but if you want to get a message across, breaking an arrow against your throat to demonstrate what inner grunt can achieve is undeniably effective.

Lee's fusion of his 20-year interest in various forms of martial arts with humour and the acting training he gained at Sydney's National Institute of Dramatic Art in the 1970s – parade ground of Mel Gibson and Cate Blanchett – has created an apparently unique way of getting self-improvement messages across.

He offers various workshops: in "Zen power", team work, presentation and speaking, and communication.

Clients include Hewlett-Packard, Fujitsu, Deutsche Bank, Qantas, and Subaru. A wodge of testimonial letters prove he's got a lot of happy customers whose performance and confidence improved markedly after the ninja chop.

One bank sales manager breathlessly reports that staff have far exceeded their targets, "some by as much as 200 per cent".

Lee is not related to those cringe-making American-style motivators who yell "you are great" to a

roomful of hysterical people standing on their chairs, cheering.

He reckons the flipside to such short-term intensity – unbalanced and driven from without rather than within – is a subsequent depression.

What he teaches corporate types, he says, is that inner power will get you further than physical strength or ego-stroking rah-rah.

You won't be told how great you are; the idea is that after learning some choice bits of martial arts thinking your performance will prove it.

Case study: Australian marathon swimmer Susie Maroney was once one of Lee's students.

Westerners have great respect for martial arts philosophies, he says, despite having learned most of what they know from movie legend Bruce Lee and his high-kicking heirs.

"There's a mystique associated with the martial arts, but it is acceptable to the general public," says Lee, who was in New Zealand last weekend to attend a speakers' conference in Auckland.

"They know it has a power. People respect it and they know it's effective.

"They've seen Bruce Lee, Jackie Chan, They've seen [the movie] Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon.

"People see the power; they want it, and they can use it in their corporate lives."

Martial arts philosophy, he says, is simple: "The mind will lead the body. Everything's about balance – yin and yang, universal laws of physics – and the mind leads the body.

"If you focus way beyond the target, then you'll achieve the target fairly easily. If you look at the solution, the problem becomes purely incidental."

So how does that relate to snapping arrows?

"It's completely martial arts," says Lee, who counts jin wu koon, aikido, hap ki do, a "little bit" of ninjustu and some Japanese sword among his talents.

"My focus was not on the arrow. The focus was way beyond you; the focus was the attitude that the arrow did not exist and you didn't exist, so the two obstacles did not exist. My obstacle was to walk past you.

"I was channelling my energy away from the area of the throat, breathing, doing centred breathing ... centring to the lower abdomen. Mind and body."

The arrows, he adds, "are not pre-softened or pre-cut".

He admits he may not be the most polished arrow-snapper or plank-breaker – yes, he does that as well – but he muses that having a foot in both Western and Eastern camps seems to give him an edge in making his message stick.

"I'm not sure how it works and why it works, but according to clients it does. I'm just an instrument."

He's proud of his work; he talks of nervous people gaining new confidence.

And women, he says, grasp many of the ideas faster than men, especially when they are pitted in physical exercises against much bigger people.

"They know they're not going to physically overpower men," says Lee, "so they're looking for other

possibilities."

[Corporate Ninja](#)

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