



Three sails
for rough seas

January 2007

Will Reed's Agili MASTERY

Shortcuts to better energy, awareness, and footwork

Manners make the man Edo Shigusa: words worth keeping

*The hardest job
kids face today
is learning
good manners
without seeing any
Fred Astaire*



Edo Shigusa

*Rudeness is
the weak man's
imitation of
strength
Eric Hoffer*

*Manners in Japan were once an
essential part of communication*

Good manners reveal character and are an important social convention. They show the attitude behind your behavior. The deterioration of manners that were once taken for granted, the increase of scandalous corporate activity, irresponsible social behavior, and violent crime all call for a serious search for solutions.

Edo Shigusa: Kanzen Rikai (Complete Guide to Edo Manners) is a popular book in Japan by Koshikawa Reiko and Hayashida Akio. The book contends that Edo manners are a fundamental but endangered aspect of Japanese social behavior.

The roots go back to NeoConfucianism, originating with the Chinese philosopher Mencius (372-289 BC), popularized in the Ming Dynasty by Wang Yang-Ming (1472-1528), and was the guiding philosophy of Japanese Samurai and Edo culture.

Edo Shigusa points out that some of the language and precepts of this era are surprisingly relevant today. Some of them are things we can learn from Japan, and serve as a convenient reminder.

Act now, think on your feet

(Soku Jikkou). Japanese have a traditional distaste for talk in the form of excuse making. People were told that in problem solving it was more important to *be hands on* than to *talk on*. This is basis of *kaizen*, or continuous improvement, in which you think as you work, and make improvements as you go.

Sixth sense (Kan). Much effort was made to refine the senses and develop the ability to intuit what was going on, rather than waiting to be told. This led to exceptional development in many aspects of culture and craftsmanship.

Answer with one yes (“Hai!” wa ichido-kiri). It was considered important to answer immediately, and with a single yes, to show that you were fully attentive and ready to act. To say yes twice was considered flippant and rude, as in “Yeah, yeah. What do you want?”

Pretend not to notice (Toki ni wa, mite minai furi). Sometimes it is best to pretend you didn't notice, if it spares a person's dignity or gives them a chance to avoid embarrassment. You don't need to

*Good manners
require space*

and time

Alphonse de
Lamartine

blow the whistle, when the other person hasn't committed a crime. Helping a person save face builds loyalty.

View the positive side of things (You ni toraete). It is not only more pleasant to be around people who see the glass as half-full rather than half-empty; it is a lot more energizing and productive too. Complainers are energy drainers.

Don't cross your arms or legs (Udeku-mi Ashikumi shigusa). Crossed arms are a sign of stubbornness or a closed mind, while crossed legs show lack of respect. In both cases, crossing your limbs also makes you less ready for action, and more vulnerable to injury or attack. It also badly affects your posture and circulation. In less casual times, it was taboo.

Don't say you don't know ("Wakaranai" to iwanai). Saying that you don't know implies that you also don't care enough to find out for the other person. It is a close-ended non-action statement, and is better to say that, "I'll try to find out for you."

Move over one fist width (Kobushi koshi ukase). Even if a bench seat is crowded, you can usually make room for one more if everyone moves over just the width of one fist. Instead on train's today you more often see a young person taking up room for two people, with legs spread out into the aisle. Proper consideration is to make room for everybody.

Don't cut across in front of people (Yokogiri shigusa). In pedestrian traffic it is merely rude to cut across in front

of someone. In automobile traffic it is downright dangerous. You see more and more people today engaging in *me first* walking behavior that totally ignores other people.

Be polite in momentary encounters (Sokunoma tsukiai). Whether in an elevator, waiting in line at a counter, or making a purchase, we have brief encounters with people everyday. In an urban environment, these are likely to silent encounters, with everyone ignoring everyone else. The effect is a bit like an engine with many moving parts and not enough oil to prevent them from grinding each other down. A smile, a brief word, a gesture of kindness can go a long way.

Edo Shigusa is about expressing a unity of thought and action, having a positive attitude, maintaining respectful body language, and learning to move gracefully in crowds. These are lessons for us all.

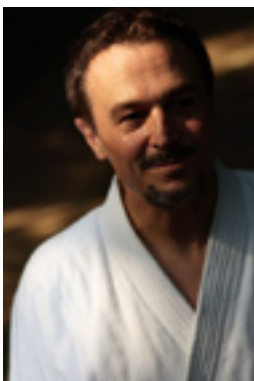
RESOURCES

Japanese Beyond Words, by Andrew Horvat. A practical book for foreigners learning to speak and act in Japanese.

Edo Shigusa: Kanzen Rikai (Complete Guide to Edo Manners), by Koshikawa Reiko and Hayashida Akio.

Search Google for NeoConfucianism in Japan, to gain a better understanding of the roots of *Edo Shigusa*.

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