

Do's and Don'ts when facilitating The Samurai Game®



As you've already learned, there are many things to pay attention to when facilitating The Samurai Game®. Following are some important reminders about what to do—and what to avoid—when you are leading the Game.

1. Be Informed and be Authentic

Being in the position of Facilitator of TSG is a big responsibility. You are responsible for establishing a safe and effective context, properly preparing participants to maximize their engagement and learning, and ensuring the safe play of the Game. There are many things you must know and understand, but you do not need to be an expert about everything. For example, while you **do** need a general understanding about areas such as Samurai, Bushido, Aikido, George Leonard, the history of the Game, and the importance of mind/body practices—you don't need to be an expert about each of these. It is critical, however, that what you do say about these areas is accurate.

If someone asks you a question that you can't answer—be honest and tell them that you don't know the answer. If it's appropriate, you can tell them that you will find out the answer, or you may encourage them to do their own research to find answers if they are interested.

Providing inaccurate information about the underpinnings the Game (which includes the samurai, Bushido, Aikido, George Leonard, the Game and Somatics), will discredit you as a professional, and will also, by association, risk discrediting The Samurai Game®, other TSG facilitators, the martial art of Aikido, and George Leonard's life-long work and legacy. Equally important, when a facilitator provides information that a participant may know is inaccurate, will negatively impact the participant's experience of TSG.

For some examples of inaccurate information and understandings on the part of Facilitators in the past, please go to the end of this document, #18.

2. Avoid asking participants “Do you have any questions?” or “Is that clear?” when explaining the rules and roles of the Game.

It is OK to ask if people have questions pertaining to physical safety when you are leading physical exercises or demonstrating battles, dying, etc., but do not open the door to other questions, which are almost always aimed at trying to find ways to stay alive or “win” during the Game. Things to consider when you are explaining the rules, roles and other parts of the set-up are...

- Tell them in advance that some of the rules and roles will seem unclear, and that is OK because it reflects life; and,
- Once or twice during the rules/roles section (at your discretion) give them brief moments to form small groups of two or three to try to recall as much as they can about what you've just told them. This reminds them of the importance of collaborating to solve problems.

- Simply say “From this point forward, no questions and no more talking—be fully present and listen carefully...”

3. Don't use phrases such as “violate the rules”, “violation of honor”, “violate your bushido “, or “indiscretion.”

Not only will these phrases sound strange to some people, they also conjure up associations with guilt or with moral judgment, which TSG is *not* about. It is not our role as Fates of War to determine whether someone who operates outside of the rules is “wrong” in their play. Doing so would position us rule keeper, moral authority or enforcer, rather than one who's job it is to keep the Game moving safely and to be arbitrary, capricious and unfair. If someone operates outside of a rule (either they forget, or didn't pay attention during the set-up, or are just trying to get away with it) it is more valuable for you to allow the individual, teammates, and opponents to notice and react (often in the graveyard and/or overnight) rather than “policing” every participant.

4. Don't spend too much time and energy “catching” people break the rules or not behaving according to what you consider to be proper bushido.

It's OK to do some of this, but “less is more.” The more you allow people to function without your calling to people's attention about who did what with a rule, and including “why” someone died – the more mysterious, thrilling and rich the Game will be. The point is to let each person confront the moral, ethical and/or practical consequences of his/her own actions, not for you as Facilitator or “authority figure” to do so.

Remember, the Game was not created to test one's ability to keep rules. The rules set the playing field. The Game is essentially about what happens as a result of what people actually do or don't do.

5. Let the structure of the Game and the participants themselves shape the Game.

You don't need to fill up silent moments with instruction, or “news reporting.” Silence is a powerful tool in the Game. Let the each Game establish a rhythm of its own, and let silence allow people to hear their own internal voices.

6. Don't over control or dominate the Game.

Be careful to not be overly controlling, domineering and/or authoritarian when facilitating TSG. Examples of behaviors that we feel detract from the experience and diminish the impact of the Game include:

- Staff standing rigidly “at attention” as participants enter the room.
- Staff counting down the time (by the second) that remains until the door opens, which causes participants to rush into the room to comply with a “be on time” rule.
- Telling participants what to do, where to go and how to stand, i.e., shepherded into a rigid adherence environment.

- Coaching or editing the “shares” or comments of participants. It’s OK to repeat what is said for those who didn’t happen to hear, but we strongly encourage you to avoid interpreting and defining (or redefining) the participants’ meaning or experience for the rest of the group. Remember, TSG is NOT a training or a coaching seminar (even though it may be delivered as part of a training or coaching seminar).
- Facilitator providing instructions in a strict authoritarian manner, such as, “On my count of 3 you will begin to practice over and over and over, and you will continue until I have you stop.” The participants will likely attempt to do exactly as instructed, in what is usually a rigid and compliant manner.

7. Don’t ask too many leading or coaching questions that direct participants’ experience and learning. Examples of questions that can be overly directive are...

- “What experience are you creating?”
- “As a result of... [finding your center], or [yelling in the face of someone], or [being the first to die], what pattern do you see about yourself?”

Let people find their own path and their own learning in the Game. (This may be particularly challenging for trainers and coaches who are accustomed to directing people’s focus and learning within the context of set programs or agendas.)

8. Don’t rush the introduction, “set-up” and rules portions of the Game.

The introduction, set-up and rules of The Samurai Game® are as important a part of the Game as are the battles. In fact, without this preliminary information and experience, the battles would have little meaning or value for participants. The Game could also be physically and psychologically unsafe for people if you rush through the introduction or set-up or rules portion.

Many individuals learn more about themselves when they reflect on how they engaged (internally and externally) and the assessments and attitudes they held during the preliminaries of the Game. This is how the Game begins to create the need for an awareness of habits, teamwork, choices, leadership, being present, staying alert, etc. It is also how the Game begins to take the participant safely across what George Leonard called “a psychological line” so that they can engage productively in the simulation.

The Set-up, and rules and roles also create a period of time during which pressure quietly builds – and this is very *samurai* and *bushido* in nature. People increasingly come face-to-face with their internal dialogue about what they think their capacity, honor, ability is and is not. This challenges people to focus, think, react, adjust and become aware of how they operate in situations outside of the seminar that involve *overwhelm*. The delivery of the rules is designed to create a “gray areas” within which people have to struggle to remember what to do and how to do it.

9. Always provide participants with THREE opportunities to become spectators instead of participants.

Strive to create an environment in which the choice to “opt out” can be made without peer pressure. We understand that eliminating peer pressure altogether is difficult in seminars and workshops – and it becomes even more difficult in certain cultural environments. Do what you can, however, including reminding people each time you offer the opportunity to “opt out” that it is as honorable and can be as valuable a learning experience as participating in the Game.

10. Be respectful when taking photographs

Avoid having a photographer walk the floor throughout the grounding and the Game. Photographers should not stand in the midst of the group, next to “the dead”, put large telephoto lens directly into people’s faces in their most intimate and personal moments. This is insensitive, invasive and it violates the intent of the Game. If pictures are important they can be captured from afar with the proper equipment. If you allow photography during the Game, ensure that it is non-intrusive using small equipment and without flash. In the USA and some other cultures, it is very important to ask participant’s permission before taking photos, and to allow them to indicate in writing whether they wish to let their photos be used for publicity or promotional purposes.

11. Use props & costumes sparingly

Some facilitators use robes or dark clothes and other props to assist their delivery of the Game. This is generally accepted even though George Leonard’s notes state that the Game needs little or no props. Props are OK as long as they don’t distract from the participant’s direct experience of themselves in the Game, become overly theatrical, or become a “crutch” for the facilitator.

Following are some examples that we have observed which may be problematic...

Wearing Hakama - The traditional samurai “Hakama” is a pant/skirt worn today in some martial arts such as Aikido, Kendo and others. If you are familiar with the Hakama, know how to properly tie and wear it, and understand some of the reasons behind its use in Japanese culture and martial arts, then feel free to wear it. The Hakama carries with it a sense of drama and implies a certain authority regarding one’s understanding of the martial arts. If you are not experienced with the Hakama, we suggest that you NOT wear one when facilitating the Game. It is very easy to stumble, fall and look obviously inexperienced when wearing the Hakama, and this will only cause participants to question your credibility.

Using a Samurai Sword - We have observed a facilitator who very dramatically draws a sword above his/her head before the battles begin and do a two-minute parade around the room, pausing at times in front of certain people and extending the sword down while music plays and the participants and staff stand to attention. While this can be highly dramatic, it also puts the spotlight squarely onto the facilitator at a time when the spotlight needs to shift onto the participant. It glamorizes the facilitator Fate of War as *the central figure* and *authority* rather than someone who is now becoming like the wind - capricious, arbitrary and unfair. Equally important, it can look embarrassingly ridiculous if you do not know how to properly pick-up, hold and put-down the sword. *Anybody* with martial arts training will immediately know if you have any training in the use of the sword. Leave this for Hollywood or your next costume party—but not The Samurai Game®. Finally, even a dull sword blade can cause injury, so do not put yourself or anybody else at risk by using a real sword.

To summarize, *don't rely upon the use of props in order to "prop up" yourself or your authority when leading the Game*. Instead, we urge you to revisit your FTC Binder, practice delivering those parts of the Game in which you feel underprepared, and take on a personal practice that will enable you to cultivate a sense of respectful and humble internal authority. George Leonard led the Game for years without a single prop or costume.

12. Don't call every battle

We have observed Games in which participants were instructed to go into battle only at the facilitator's command, and only one pair at a time. They responded only when the facilitator's instructed them on exactly what battle to do and how to do it. The facilitator's voice was constantly heard, issuing orders to the daimyo as to what he or she was supposed to do next. The problem with this interpretation of Facilitation is that it puts the facilitator in the spotlight as the central player and authority figure in the Game, instead of the participants themselves, and it diminishes the complexity, chaos and dilemma that the Game can provide for the sake of learning.

13. Don't rely on confrontation as the primary way to create intensity and generate learning.

While there is certainly a time and place for confrontation as a learning tool, it is not always the best tool, and it is frequently overused in the training industry. Silence or neutral questions often generate equal or even greater intensity, and these strategies may allow participants to focus more on themselves internally, rather than constantly being pulled out of themselves in confrontation with the Fates of War or with confrontational situations created by the Fates. There is more to learn when the Fate of War leaves participants to struggle with their own decisions than when the Fate of War tells them what to do. We are not saying the Fate of War needs to be silent all the time, only that he or she needs to be un-scripted and alive, capricious, unfair, unpredictable, and arbitrary.

14. Only certified facilitators can lead The Samurai Game®, including the context setting, set-up, rules and roles, battles and debrief.

These are all critical elements of the Game experience, are part of the Facilitator Training and Certification. It is important that they be delivered appropriately. If you have assistance or staff in the room during the Game, it is your responsibility to ensure that they are not placed in the Facilitator position at any time.

15. Make the End of the Game transition gentle and smooth

We have observed facilitators who, at the conclusion of the winning Daimyo's speech and walk back through time, abruptly, loudly and almost cheerfully shouted, "Ladies and Gentlemen - the Game is over!" and then begin to applaud. Of course the participants, then feeling a need to comply, all began to applaud as well. This is emotionally "jolting," can easily be experienced as inauthentic and is not recommended.

There are often strong emotions experienced by both the participants and the Facilitator by the end of the Game. We strongly urge you to honor these feelings by *letting them be*—and allowing participants to more gradually re-adjust to the return to their normal daily lives, rather than jolt them into it. Let folks transition back into their normal lives and process their emotions at their own pace.

16. When raising “dead” warriors, bring them to a seated position (usually on the floor).

This helps to maintain the “samurai” spirit of the Game—calm, dignified, alert and ready (no talking or excessive movement).

17. Don’t relieve the Sentry from duty.

In the thousands of people who’ve played with us – some quite old and some with physical disabilities – we have never taken it upon ourselves as facilitators to relieve the Sentry from his or her duty. It’s really up to the team to care for their Sentry. If someone gets the Sentry job and then begins to falter – they know what to do - they simply die. This is part of the process of the Game. Remember, there are many ways a team can take care of a Sentry who is standing for a long time, including massaging their neck or shoulders, kneeling down to let the Sentry sit on someone’s back, etc., and it is up to the team and Daimyo to figure that out. Don’t be overly protective of this role.

18. Some examples of inaccurate statements we have heard Facilitators make, followed by our comments. Please don’t make these types of mistakes...

- *“Aikido was introduced to the US at the turn of the 20th century”*
Fact: The founder of Aikido, Morihei Ueshiba, was 17 years old at the turn of the century and decades away from creating aikido. Aikido had not yet evolved in Japan as a term. The *aiki* concept was first introduced to the U.S. in 1935 by Japanese Navy Admiral Isamu Takeshita who used the word *aikibudo*. As a general practice there was much debate inside Japan about allowing foreigners to understand and practice the art, and it wasn’t until after WWII that aikido began to make its way into the U.S.
- *“Ueshiba went from school to school learning martial arts. Ueshiba was frail as a boy, interested in math, physics, esoteric and exotic sciences. He was made to study martial arts by his father who was concerned about his weak body and his nervous temperament.) “and he already had a belief system. He noticed that almost always there was high competition. He had a belief system and this competition didn’t fit with his belief system.”*
Fact: Ueshiba was a highly competitive and a very contentious person for a long time. When he was a young man he became obsessed with physical prowess and fighting. It was only through long years of struggle, getting into trouble – including with the law and studying under an eccentric and controversial spiritual leader - that he began to change his ways. It wasn’t part of an early belief system that was informing him to move away from competitiveness--on the contrary, his belief evolved over decades of practice and involvement with others.

- *“I want to introduce Lance Giroux. He’s a member of the George Leonard Foundation.”*
 Fact: There is no such foundation. Lance is not a member of any organization that George founded. The point here is—do your homework, and don’t make assertions with respect to George Leonard, other facilitators, TSG, Aikido, Samurai Game Associates or any other related theme unless you are certain that they are accurate. Doing otherwise goes against the fundamental spirit of honesty and integrity that are at the heart of TSG. Do your homework – and do it diligently!
- *“If a child is physically abused they will stand like this (facilitator demonstrated a stance where is person is placing one foot in front of the other.)”*
 Fact: A generalized assertion, debatable and one that some therapists would say ‘not necessarily so.’ Also, it was interesting that the stance demonstrated was actually the stance known as “hanmi” – the stance taught in aikido.
- *“In aikido there are two principles: (1) protect yourself from attack, (2) if anyone was to attack you, then you protect them.”*
 Fact: There are actually many more fundamental principles in Aikido, and the above-stated principles can actually be quite misleading. What the above statements are attempting to convey is the *spirit* of Aikido, which is to extend protection not only to oneself, but also to one’s opponents. If you are interested in understanding more about the principles and practices of Aikido, we strongly suggest you study some of the many books that have been written about it – and we recommend you visit an aikido dojo a few times, AND if you find it valuable begin a physical practice in the study of aikido.
- “Muscle memory happens very fast”
 Fact: Muscle memory is developed through continual repetition over time. Anybody remotely informed about human learning and neuroscience understands this. Technically speaking, muscles don’t “remember”—it is in the brain and neurons that “memory” resides—not the muscle fibers. In George Leonard’s book “Mastery” an entire section is dedicated to *staying on the plateau and practicing for the sake of practice*. It specifically applies to muscle memory, overcoming old belief patterns and habits, and establishing new ways of being and understanding—all of which take time.
- *“In the Game there are no physical requirements except to lay dead for a long period of time.”*
 Fact: The Game can actually demand a great deal from participants, physically. For instance, Sentries will stand for hours without moving feet; people may find themselves standing on one foot for long periods of time; people may make sudden movements to avoid being hit with shuriken; people may get stepped on; they may have to yell at the top of their voice and completely exhale all air from their lungs; they may be asked to dance; two players may stand for up to 20 minutes with their arms extended, etc. This is one reason why we invest so much time in advance of the Battles introducing physical movements and laying out the rules and battles before participants agree to play. What is accurate to say about the Game is: *“In the Game there is no significant amount of physical contact – you will not be hitting or kicking or striking someone.”*

- *“Everyone now pick up your [imaginary] samurai sword and shield. When you go into battle you carry your samurai sword and shield with you. You then salute your opponent.”*

Comment: Throughout this Game we observed, almost all players maintained postures with arms held as though they were carrying swords and shields, whether on the battlefield or in their camps. Many would run onto the battlefield when instructed by the Fate of War, in a clash of arms, rather than practicing a dignified walk from center and an honorable challenge. And for the record, truthfully speaking, the historical samurai did not use shields. By making this inaccurate statement during The Samurai Game® the Facilitator showed that he did not know what he was talking about. He undermined his own credibility AND by association he could have undermined the reputations of George Leonard, The Samurai Game®, and other facilitator who make it a practice to speak accurately and intelligently. This facilitator’s statement and delivery method was contrary to the training he received during his certification process. He was warned to not do this again.