

Minutes 22 March 2020 11am Pacific time to 12:30pm Pacific time via SKYPE

Joint meeting of SOA board and SOA NTC – Topic Branding

Present: SOA Board - Connie (chair), Shin (NTC Chair), SOA Board: HF Ito, Herve, Nancy, Brad, David (7 members). And from the NTC: Lee S., Rob G., Mike, Jim (4 members) (with Connie, Shin and HF Ito also members)

Excused/Absent: Byron, Michael T., Sandra, Chris and Rob Kedoin (officer – Webmaster)

Guest: Robert Friedman from Fearless Branding – our potential consultant on branding

I. Welcome

Connie as chair welcomed the joint meeting. Connie outlined today's meeting with focus to hear from each of the 11 people in attendance and then move to a vote by the SOA board for a "go ahead or do not go ahead" vote on understanding the process of branding.

Robert Friedman introduced himself and expanded the topic of branding with the questions of 'what are goals for Shintaido?' 'What is the role of branding to bring in new students?' 'What is the role of branding to build Shintaido into existing in the future?' A brand is meant to articulate a purpose or meaning. Who benefits from Shintaido? "Who do we wish attract as students?' The clarity of the five questions and their answers and how we agree on consistent answers so that Shintaido continues to grow is at the core of this process. The work of branding will include determining on the spectrum of one end being a very definitive definition and the other end being a very open varied unrestricted definition – where does Shintaido place itself. One example is Tai Chi with a great variety of classes versus Pilates with a very specific, conforming type of teaching. Robert spoke to his experience of seeing committed members of Shintaido where people stay for decades and yet there is little new blood (i.e. new members).

II. Discussion on benefits and concerns with branding

Connie opened the discussion to hear from those in attendance. Ideally each person would have one minute, and Connie will call upon them.

Connie opened with her interest with Ito Sensei making a clear plan for his role between 2020 and 2024 and this time is for us to develop our brand for Shintaido, while a concern that there could be splintering or loss of members through the process.

Herve – he expressed concern at the beginning, and agrees a need to identify of what is essential for Shintaido and to have a clear visual and essential goals.

Jim: Thanked the group for coming together. The video raised more questions. He sees Shintaido in the archetypes of Warrior and Spiritual. Jim states we practice a movement for body/mind/spirit and how it manifests itself is different. We are broad and have taught to a broad market. He thinks a key question is "How are we different?"

Lee S.: She has been practicing for 45 years, she found Shintaido would draw herself out of her inner self and made her a bigger person. She experienced a breakthrough but finds as she teaches this is not what others wish from her. She likes to teach so she has found to teach where she can find students. Questions are 'how to brand and get students?' " Help to teachers to market."

Rob G.: It is a struggle to think about what is Shintaido, it is very individual and in teaching we are 'selling' ourselves when we market. Something common is the life and death aspect to Shintaido.

Shin: He found it challenging to do the 5 questions from the video and difficult to answer. He would find it helpful to have a common language while what we practice is personal. We do find at a gasshuku that we enjoy each other so there must be common essence. He is interested to find the common essence.

Mike: Concerns are what has been done before and not succeeded, there could be loss of membership. He does feel it is worth the risk to share a vision and then draw in new students. The archetypes speak to the subconscious and he found transformation to be one with the Phoenix as a type.

Nancy: Agrees with Lee S. and Robert G. about self-exploration. She believes people are not currently interested in changing their lives. People do somethings but are not focused on changing their lives. However, she is willing to take the risk – why not?!

Brad: Found the video to have good questions and would be helpful to address how he approaches an audience – at present he has two groups church members and/or ecstatic dancers. He believes this will be an excellent process. He wonders do we have the infrastructure and budget for this project.

David: States a very interesting process and willing to give it a trial. He respects we have tried before and thinks also about the try and try again approach. He sees Robert F. as bringing the leadership on this topic. He made the statement that people see slow, gentle movements with a little bend in the knees and from this visual say – Tai Chi. This visual is a trademark. He asks what is the signature when people see Shintaido. He takes the role of Devil's Advocate – What is it about Butoh, the Japanese dance that started in the 1959 and has more people than Shintaido? Butoh is even weirder and harder to explain than Shintaido, is even more opaque and incomprehensible yet is so famous?

Ito: he wishes to participate via text.

Robert F. spoke to the process and big picture. He states the factor for success will be the decisiveness of the group. A big group can take along time to arrive at consensus with at one point, one people makes all decisions to small groups getting input from others. He presented that Connie and he have spoken about having a group of 5 as the core working group. The group would at periodic times get the input from others.

David asked about infrastructure and creating a toolbox.

Robert F. states the first work would be the defining process and creating a toolbox would be second. He believes this group needs to decide about a 'leap of faith' to go forward or not. Are there core values that can be agreed upon? And then to teach towards these core values. Others might choose to do a 'spin off' from Shintaido for their teaching.

Jim asked if what Robert F. would be doing would result in new members?

Robert F. answered that using branding as the method to gain new members would be essential. To focus on 'what Shintaido stands for' then helps answer who is the audience. We then communicate to those who see the value of Shintaido. Robert spoke to DEFINE, then DEVELOP a toolbox as a second step.

At this point the group agree to extend the meeting to 12:20pm to allow more discussion before a vote occurs.

Robert F. expanded on a core group -probably 5 – who would be selected from volunteers. This core group would then check in with others at structured points; this core group would need to listen carefully to input from others, however ultimately this group would be entrusted by the larger group of board and NTC, to the job of arriving at a definition.

David wanted more time to reflect on WHY Tai chi and Butoh are successful without marketing. Robert F. stated for BUTOH a key difference is they are a performance dance. People watch, they may or may not then join the group. Tai Chi has the lineage and bigger cultural trends.

Ito texted that Shintaido has a wider variety of expression. Ito related finding in a general audience someone to help him promote to others.

Lee S. related the life/death element is central. Robert F. spoke to people seeing performances and who was attracted. Has Shintaido been proactive in demonstrations. Who has come from demonstration? Connie from Cherry Blossom, Brad from a demonstration, Lee from seeing a group practice in public in Tokyo.

Rob G. spoke to have the language to express Shintaido. Current use is the Japanese language and how to make the transition to English and be more accessible. Both the visual and the language are important. The visual of the Shintaido jump is not current, people are not doing the jump; it does convene the image of breaking through barriers.

Jim spoke to doing the branding to attract new students and the leap to classes, what we teach and have the teaching match the branding.

Robert F. stressed to define and to be consistent.

Mike spoke about teaching Tenshingoso, Eiko, sword, he thinks of transformation and the Phoenix, the birth/rebirth. He states to do the branding, then the webinars/demonstrations/promotion.

Brad spoke to this being a hybrid world where much is shifting to online teaching. Connie mentioned the board will be getting a request shortly about ZOOM.

David spoke of three categories of outreach: Demonstrations/public classes/1:1 invitation.

III. Vote to proceed

Connie requested the board members to vote. The question via roll call is Shall the SOA board vote to proceed with branding. This is a budget of \$2000

Roll call:

Brad YES; Shin: YES; Herve YES; Nancy YES; David Yes; Connie Yes; HF Ito YES.

David then asked for a clarification on budget, amount of time and ability to finish, including if Robert F. is doing the process to completion for a set amount of Money. Robert F. states he will now provide 20 hours for the \$2000, while he is committed, he cannot guarantee a finish. He can offer to the core group the skills and steps to move to completion. He can

provide a timeline and milestones. He believes when the group is about 10% into the process, he will have a better judgement on completion.

The core group of 5 will have the five questions to answer for each person

The group will then work together to see how close or how far apart they are as a group.

Robert F. will join at strategic moments. Robert F. again stressed anything can happen as the group works, he will work to give us next steps and how to proceed.

David states he felt he got the clarification needed and a second roll call was made: Shall SOA proceed with branding.

Brad YES; Shin: YES; Herve YES; Nancy YES; David Yes; Connie Yes.

HF Ito had excused himself before the second vote was requested.

Closing comments: Members thanked each other and Robert F. for their time. Many expressed encouragements, a good process. Robert F. closed with that branding can be very demanding and very intimate work. The SOA Board and SOA NTC thanked Robert F. for his time today.

IV. Next steps

- A. Volunteers to send Connie an email of their interest and willingness to commit to 6 to 12 months of work on branding. This work will include both individual homework and group work. The group work includes both group work as the group of 5 plus sessions with Robert F.
- B. Connie and Robert F. will set a preliminary timeline
- C. The core group will need to establish how they will work together, how they make decisions, how and when to get input from others. As well as what input is needed or requested.
- D. Once the core group is established, a time will be given for the Kick-off meeting where Robert F. will continue to facilitate this process.

Minutes respectfully submitted by

Connie Borden

3/22/2020