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SENSEI'S BLOGS:

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Authenticity

Recently I attended an Aikido seminar in Melbourne. It's been several years since I have been there so it was great to catch up with old friends and to make some new ones. On the first night we wandered from our hotel down to Bridge Rd in Richmond, an area well known for cafes and restaurants. Eventually we chose a Lebanese restaurant mainly because it has been a while since I have eaten their food... and we were getting hungry.

The restaurant was fairly large and there were quite a few people dining there – a good sign. It was obviously a 'family' restaurant with well worn traditional Lebanese furnishings and decor. It was certainly not a 'flash' restaurant. When we were seated and had received our water, I asked the waiter if there were any specials in addition to the menu which was somewhat straightforward. He seemed a little bemused and with a quick shake of the head answered that the menu was it. We decided to order a few entree items so we could pick and choose. The first selection arrived very quickly... the servings were generous, the ingredients were very fresh and the flavours / textures were fantastic. The waiter displayed a quiet pride in the food when he served our table and received our compliments a little later with another nod of the head clearly indicating 'of course it's good'.

There was some Lebanese music in the background which became louder part way through the night as a female dancer in traditional dress entered the dining area and began to dance around the tables. It wasn't a 'staged' show as such... more just a part of this restaurant's way. The entertainment lasted about twenty minutes and the diners entered into the atmosphere, clapping and stamping our feet to the music. Meanwhile our second selection came and went and was as good as the first with just the right wine recommended to match the food. Lastly some homemade dessert treats to finish off. The service was understated, unobtrusive and timely. And all this for *very* low prices. We left with big smiles after thanking the waiter and staff for a great evening... all received with warm appreciation.

The whole night caused me to reflect on the power of *Authenticity*. There were no 'specials'. There were no expensive furnishings or decor. They weren't trying to be something other than what they were. There was a simple menu with well thought out choices. Of course diners couldn't wander into the kitchen and tell the chef what to offer or how to prepare it. The food was all homemade and presented with real care and pride. The atmosphere was not 'artificially created' – it sprang from the people who owned and ran the restaurant. There was no trendy marketing, 'famous' chef or high prices. The whole experience was seamless because of its naturalness.

This *authenticity* is what I believe makes a great person, business or





organisation and it is what we can always aspire to at Compass and AMAI. We are what we are... we do what we do... and people can choose to access the services we provide (or work in providing them) safe in the knowledge that we will always do our best. There are no 'specials' – we have a 'menu' and we seek to keep it contemporary and appropriate to the needs of our consumers. It is important to note that this must not be equated with inflexibility or unwillingness to change - it is really an acknowledgement that as people we can't be everything to every person. Authenticity is the foundation and the centre. We can be who we are *at the same time* as embracing change, growth and development that is in accord with and a natural extension of who we are.

David Dangerfield

