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## **Wayward general wants to whip Japan's wimpy civilians into winners**

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Former chief of staff of Japan's Air Self Defense Force, General Toshio Tamogami, was dismissed in 2008 after he published a politically incorrect magazine article that rankled Japan's civilian political leaders. Retired, he now writes a weekly column for Asahi Geino. In his latest installment he turns his attention to the status of Japan's civilians, particularly young males, who he complains have "no gumption."

He recently advised the president of a small company to encourage his staff to laugh loudly, since laughter will boost their "power" and, since laughter is contagious, will be beneficial to co-workers as well. He also advised "Make your subordinates set work and personal goals." When he was commander of an air wing, at the start of each year he ordered his 1,500 subordinates to write down two individual objectives, one professional and one personal. "As long as people live, there will be things they want to do," he writes. "the malaise among so many of today's young people is due to their having no dreams or goals. By encouraging young people to have goals that overlap with both their public and private lives, their motivation will be boosted."

Tamogami admits that the young people of today have been raised in "unfortunate times." Due to interference by parents or the parent-teacher association, a school will become ensnarled in the regulations if even a trivial dispute arises between students, leading to a huge outcry. Stifled by so many rules and regulations, children have no outlet for their energy. While it's important to take proactive measures to avoid injuries, won't children become tougher after they've experienced a few bruises and scrapes? It used to be a natural part of growing up; but due to over-protectiveness children are insulated from learning from their stumbles and falls.

In primary and middle school, children are constantly admonished, being told "You can't do this" or "You can't do that," and they grow up not knowing how to wield their own power. In other words, they have few experiences to stir up their motivation.

Humans exert both beneficial energy and bad energy simultaneously, Tamogami believes. It is important to do a good job of suppressing the bad energy, but when it is reduced to zero, then the good energy likewise falls to zero. His point, it appears, is that sometimes kids benefit

from having some sense knocked into their heads. “It has already been some time since corporal punishment was banned outright,” he writes. “But for children who don’t listen to adults, how can you make them learn anything without the application of one or two fists?”

He rambles on, asserting that when corporal punishment is meted out to children who misbehave, its purpose is to redirect their energy in a good direction. By ignoring that principle and banning corporal punishment outright, a child will grow up thinking, “No matter what I do, I won’t get whipped for it,” and not reflect on their own badness. Obviously it’s “excessive,” he concedes, to strike a child to the degree that causes an injury; but the trend to halt all corporal punishment is the same as not scolding them when they misbehave as well.

“One facet of growing up occurs when the child first realizes the existence of adults who are to be feared,” he writes. “The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology has issued criteria concerning corporal punishment, but I wonder if such criteria are necessary. It should be left to the prerogative of the teacher.”

And if the teacher is a brutal sadist out for blood? The general doesn’t say, but asserts instead that in today’s society, people have no awareness of how to bring up a child, a situation that’s come about because society has placed the emphasis on making the job easier for parents and leaders of society. So when all else fails, it would seem, one can always fall back on tough love.

## Questions

1. Do you agree with General Tamogami that young Japanese men have “no gumption”? Why? Why not? If you agree, why do you think this situation has arisen?
2. What do you think about the various pieces of advice he gave to the small company president? Is it good advice? Why? Why not?
3. General Tamogami says that young people of today have been raised in “unfortunate times”. Do you agree? Why? Why not?
4. Have we become too protective of children?
5. Currently corporal punishment is completely banned in schools. Is this a good policy? Why? Why not?
6. Should we allow teachers more freedom to decide on punishments and discipline?
7. Is it too easy to become “ensnarled in the regulations” at schools?

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