

„The Way of Go“

In 2004, Troy Anderson wrote a groundbreaking book on the subject of the interesting similarities between the strategic playing style of the Asian game "Go" and strategic behavior in professional and private life.

In an entertaining way and also easy and fluid to read, Troy leads the reader to ancient wisdom that can be found in the game of Go, but also in Zen or martial arts. The insights from these mysterious, traditional strategies still play a major role today in Asian societies such as in Japan, Korea and China.

Troy divides them into 8 dimensions or basic "parent" rules, which he explains step by step and in detail - based on situations he has experienced himself in his professional and private life or with the help of well-known examples from the global economy. While in the countries mentioned, every child learns these rules at home and at school and can apply them throughout their lives, these insights into good strategic action are often hardly known in western countries.

Experienced Go players will find some of them familiar and will find it interesting how similar the basic strategic Go rules are in professional and private life. Conversely, Troy offers decision-makers from business and society clear suggestions for taking a closer look at these findings and perhaps even consciously using the game of Go as an aid to "strategy training".

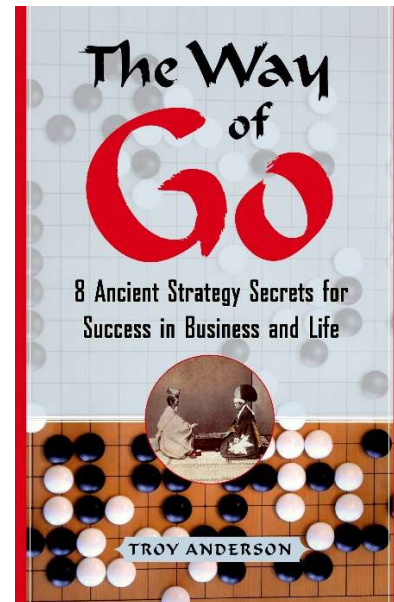
The game of Go is extremely easy to learn, but offers enough complexity to allow you to practice it for a lifetime and compete with opponents. In Go, two players take turns placing stones on a board with 19x19 grid points. Once placed, the stones cannot be moved, but can be enclosed and thus captured. The player with the largest territory on the playing field wins.

The detailed rules of the game of Go themselves are only discussed in the appendix of the book, which is why it can be useful to first familiarize yourself with the basics of the game of Go and get a feeling for the style of play and complexity.

The 8 strategic dimensions or basic rules are as follows:

1. **Global Local** – From What Perspective Are You Looking?
2. **Owe Save** – Are You Taking Risks or Playing Safe?
3. **Slack Taut** – Are You Playing Loose or Tight?
4. **Reverse Forward** – Are You Looking Backward or Forward?
5. **Us Them** – Who Is Friend and Who Is Foe?
6. **Lead Follow** – Should You Seize or Wait?
7. **Expand Focus** – Do You Diversify or Unify?
8. Sorry, There Are No Rules

The 8th rule is humorously a reminder that all the rules are subjective and their use depends very much on the situation at hand.



In order to explain these basic rules as basic principles of strategic thinking, each basic rule is broken down into various "tactical" behaviors - often with the help of well-known proverbs and always in the overall context.

In "**Global Local**", the beginning of the game (on the initially empty playing field), the middle game and the end game are examined - each phase of the game has its own basic strategy and leads to interesting insights. For example, the considerations for each move are similar to the agile way of working in the business world, in order to first analyze the situation in each iteration (move), set priorities, make the decided move and finally reflect on the opponent's reaction and your own success. As a result, you initially play "sabaki", i.e. light, adaptable and flexible, and then later in the game you look more into details in search of the best possible remaining move.

Proverbs such as "changes of plan are welcome", "play the stone with the greatest possibilities", "give up the small to win the big" or "don't be too greedy" fit well into this first basic rule of strategy.

The chapter on "**Owe Save**" is about the balance between taking risks and playing safely - a constant theme in private and professional environments. Here you will find insights such as "Urgent stones are more important than large stones", "Adjust the risk to your progress", "Play in the largest free area" or "Fighting is a sign of strength, but fighting for the sake of fighting is a weakness".

"**Slack Taut**" is about the question of when to play loosely and when to play very close to the opponent, when to attack and when to defend and whether attack/defense should be done from a distance or close up. These are, for example, typical questions when developing a strategy when dealing with competitors. But the saying "Don't throw good money after bad" also has parallels in Go.

"**Reverse Forward**" addresses the duality of the game: Yin & Yang, black and white stones, the balance of attack and defense, seeing the opponent's territory through his eyes - abstract pattern recognition often plays a role in strategic decisions and is a prerequisite for mentally playing through your own and your opponent's next moves.

Then, in "**Us Them**" the importance of finding the right balance in the game of Go is discussed, because the goal is not (as in chess) to destroy the opponent, but "only" to own a little more territory at the end. Accordingly, it is important not only to be able to assess yourself well, but also your opponent - otherwise you will lose half of your games.

In addition to this wisdom, the concept of SHU - HA - RI is also mentioned, which is of great importance even for Asian companies such as Toyota: SHU means thoroughly acquiring all the basic knowledge and HA means trying out an approach that is different from the approaches used before. Finally, the highest level, RI, involves developing new approaches that are unique to you.

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Shu Ha Ri

In "**Lead Follow**" the focus is on when you can lead and when you should follow. The principle usually applies that you are more likely to follow when you have "debts," i.e. have to resolve unresolved risks, and that you can lead when you are relatively safe. But there are also situations in which you lead by following - namely when the opponent is working "for you". And of course it depends on finding the right moment when you can lead ("sente") or should follow ("gote").

The last chapter, "**Expansion Focus**" is dedicated to the well-known problem: "You can't do everything you want when you have limited time and limited resources." Continuous review and adjustment of the (game) strategy are necessary for this, as is keeping an overview, playing lightly ("sabaki") and using the opponent's latent threats. Many references to previous chapters of the book also bring the argument full circle here.

Overall, a very readable book that not only explains ancient wisdom that helps with strategy development, but also provides many examples that show its current importance in today's world. A treasure of Asian wisdom that can certainly give the Western world a lot of inspiration.

Review by Michael Tiegelkamp, August 2024