

## Winning in Life: Getting Guidance

By JEFF FARR

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*“And then I got guidance from my senior leader....”*

Once you’ve heard a lot of SGI experiences, this line sets you off — you know what’s coming next. The member gets guidance, has a realization about his or her practice, and then overcomes the problem. Getting guidance is often described as this big turning point.

But isn’t it true that many SGI-USA members never get guidance? Some even cringe at the word *guidance*.

Actually, the word *guidance* doesn’t just mean meeting or calling a senior, usually a person with more years of practice than you, for advice. There are many different forms of guidance in the SGI, including SGI President Ikeda and other leaders’ guidance in the publications, the guidance we give each other at meetings, and even the guidance you give yourself. Guidance, encouragement, advice, whatever you want to call it — words, ideas, experiences that give you that extra burst of inspiration to overcome a problem — is everywhere in the SGI. The only way to avoid guidance in the SGI is to close your ears.

Usually, though, when people talk about getting guidance they mean getting advice from a senior in faith. So here are some points to keep in mind if you decide you want to get this kind of guidance:

- **Guidance is not a one-way thing.** Guidance is really a dialogue that encourages both parties. “Through dialoguing together and giving each other hope and confidence to have the courage to challenge anything, it is the individual getting guidance who makes his or her victory happen,” says Reiko Groshell, SGI-USA young women’s division chief. “So, I don’t believe that guidance is a one-way thing. Of course, the senior should have a strong determination to give the member hope and confidence to challenge whatever the situation, or even courageously state what the person may be doing wrong.”

- **Guidance bolsters your self-motivation.** You’re on the wrong track if you’re hoping a senior will give you all the answers when you seek guidance. In fact, guidance can be a great reminder that you’re on your own — it’s all up to you. In President Ikeda’s *The New Human Revolution*, vol. 5, there’s a scene where the newly appointed leader of Europe, Eiji Kawasaki, asks Shin’ichi Yamamoto what he’s supposed to do in his new responsibility. Shin’ichi just answers: “You have to think of everything yourself and then do everything yourself. You have no one else to depend upon or turn to.” President Ikeda goes on to explain that while it’s great to have a seeking spirit, the humility to ask questions, etc., the purpose of Buddhist guidance is to develop a person’s initiative and independence.

- **Guidance can give you another perspective on your struggles.** Alain de Botton, in a new book on French writer Marcel Proust, argues that one of Proust’s central messages was the importance of taking a second look at things. Proust’s guidance to a young man who was obsessed with becoming rich was that he should study Chardin’s paintings, which are often of the most ordinary subjects like kitchen utensils, to discover the beauty already around him. In other words, to take a second look at his environment. Guidance serves a similar purpose: to let us hear someone’s perhaps more objective view of our situation and come up with our own new perspective.

- **Guidance is not something that you *have* to follow.** Ms. Groshell puts it well: “The bottom line is that everything is up to the individual. What’s important is what the member does *after* the guidance.

“Sometimes, people go ‘guidance shopping’ until they hear something they want to hear. And sometimes, the member feels it was not appropriate guidance. But in my own

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experience, all that mattered was that — whatever the guidance I received — I took it to the Gohonzon and, sure enough, because I was sincere in wanting a solution, I made the right thing happen.”

A lot more could be said about guidance, but the bottom line is that it can be a turning point precisely because it can be the impetus for *you* to make a new start, see things a new way, or renew a determination.

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