

SENSEI SAYS?

“Do not pray for an easy life, pray for the strength to endure a difficult one.” –Bruce Lee





Konnichiwa! My name is Bill Viola Jr., but 99% of the people in my life call me *Sensei*.

Exactly how I earned that title is a labor of love, fueled by an endless journey of mistakes, missteps, and mishaps that ultimately lead me to enlightenment 💡. To understand where I’m coming from, you’ll need to take a quick peak at where I’ve been to appreciate my *Violosophy* and see what inspired this curriculum of awesomeness! Life hits hard, and it can completely knock you out cold without some defense. It’s like Mike Tyson said, “Everyone has a plan until they get punched in the face.” While it’s true that, “what doesn’t kill you will make you stronger,” I’d rather dodge Iron Mike’s (or your generation’s Jon “Bones” Jones) right hook if I can, wouldn’t you? Luckily, my convictions taught me to how to “block and counter.” I can teach you how to outmaneuver the bullies, but as they say, “you need to weigh-in to wrestle.” The game of life is filled with spectators and/or players so it’s up to you to take action! Don’t watch life pass you by. Let’s play.


Simon says put your left arm up. Simon says touch your nose. Sit down. You’re out! Having flashbacks to Kindergarten yet? Who hasn’t played the age-old classic at one time or another? I often reminisce about those carefree days and wide-eyed wonderment of being the last man standing. If Simon was in your corner, it gave you limitless confidence; you could conquer the world. Simon could be your best friend 😊.

The game, in its simplicity, parallels life. One person, the controller 🎮, essentially influences your next move. It could be a friend, foe, or even your subconscious, but someone

or something is always telling you what to do. Either you listen carefully or stumble; make a conscious decision to follow the leader or deliberately disobey. Sometimes it's a sudden lapse in judgement—a mistake. Nonetheless, at the end of the game, there are only a few winners. Life is tough.

At school, the teacher is the controller. At home, it's our parents. As we grow older the game is more complicated with bosses, spouses, friends, siblings, doctors, politicians, and of course your faith—God. You get the idea; it's a spider web of Simons telling us what to do or not to do. To make matters worse, those Simons begin to contradict themselves and pull you in opposite directions. Your wife says left  while your mom says right . Your Pastor says up  and your boss says down . Suddenly, you don't like Simon anymore.

While Simon is merely a fictional character in my game-of-life analogy, I grew up with a real life figure. In my household, Simon's reign was short-lived, replaced with a much more formidable figure—*Sensei*. You see, my father, Bill Sr., is a badass karate master. Affectionately known as *Sensei*, his wisdom is revered. In my world, *Sensei* and dad were one in the same. The game had changed.

My father was born with strong Sicilian roots bearing the stereotypical fruit -- a red hot Italian temper and equally famous short fuse . One could say nitroglycerine flowed through his veins. His fiery temperament runs deep, but passion may better describe his explosions. That dynamite personality allowed him to love as hard as he worked. He believed everyone had unrealized ability (aka potential). He saw something in me, and so our journey began.

Violosophy is steeped in martial arts tradition: discipline, respect and honor. My home away from home was the *dojo*. Some days I was in the “zone,” and others, sluggish. The tone and language could become quite colorful depending on my demeanor. One can imagine when *Sensei Says...* you sat up a little straighter. He employed a serious no-nonsense approach to working out. I had to leave everything in the ring. Yes, *Sensei* could be a tyrant at times, but his mission was admirable. Why? To quote one of my favorite movies *The Bronx Tale*, because, “The saddest thing in life is wasted talent.”

Kickin’ Flicks 🎬: *Bronx Tale* (1993) was Robert DeNiro’s directorial debut. This coming of age gem is loaded with street wise characters. The film tackles racism, while teaching you to follow your heart ❤️. Definitely worth a 120 minutes of your time.

So, day-in and day-out, my blood, sweat, and tears poured onto the *tatami* (mat). When failure seemed eminent, *Sensei* would preach “will over skill” and somehow, somehow, my mind prevailed. Under his watchful eye, I spent thousands of hours honing my craft. I was always the smallest, never the fastest, and certainly not the most naturally gifted athlete at the time; however I was gritty and driven. He’d remind me, “Hustle beats talent when talent doesn’t hustle.” My arms and legs would scream exhaustion, but the 🧠 fell on deaf ears. Just before my breaking point, *Sensei* had an uncanny way to squeeze out one extra percent of effort. For that I am forever grateful. I found a way to win, and I won over and over again. When I failed, it was haunting. When I survived, it was euphoria -- an adrenaline shot 📌 of confidence you can’t describe. In those moments, I had won a round of *Sensei Says*.

Victory was exhilarating, but being pushed to the limit can conjure love/hate emotions. While other kids played outside, I was hitting a heavy bag. I didn’t always appreciate the sacrifice, but I did obey *Sensei*. Deep down, he was strengthening me for life’s battles. *Sensei*

Says became a domino effect. The work ethic and principals spread to my school work, studying for tests, or even helping a friend. I had become an overachiever, and no goal was unattainable. *Sensei* wasn't just preparing me for a fight in a tournament; he was training me for the ultimate crown, the championship of life 🏆. That competitive spirit has driven me to be the man I am today. I've never been satisfied with Bs, second place, or vice president; I wanted high honors, the grand championship, and the VIP parking space. Obviously, I've come up short at different points in my life, but my confidence never waivers. It's a testament of *Sensei's* Molotov cocktail that always fired me up.

Even though *Sensei* ruled with an iron fist 🖊️, he loved us dearly. His persona was larger than life, a man everyone seemed to admire. As a kid, I remember random men bowing to him at a bank or gas station. I didn't fully understand why, but I was enamored. Strangers would thank me for what my dad had done for them, how he changed their life, or pushed them to become successful. He wasn't just my dad; he was *Sensei* to an entire community. I wanted to be that guy.

I began to wonder, do I have what it takes? I began to think about my dad's remarkable focus and drive. Where did it stem from? I tried to imagine his childhood. My Grandfather and namesake (William Viola I) was the "Godfather of Brownsville," a charismatic figure who, for lack of better words was a *Don*.

Sensei Says 🗣️: Brownsville, Pennsylvania was once the gateway to the West. In the 1800s People used to say, "Pittsburgh will amount to nothing — it's too close to Brownsville." Today, Pittsburgh's metropolitan area is 2,324,743 people while Brownsville has dwindled to 2,249. *Don* is an honorific title (prefix) in Italian with historical roots with nobility. It is reserved for people of high esteem such as priests, civic leaders, and powerful men.

He was loved by many, feared by some, but respected by everyone. Sadly, he cashed in his chips far too soon leaving my dad (an only child) as the man of the house in middle school. Those moments can break a man's psyche, but my father chose to fight. He fought for everything, every day to make his family proud.

His workaholic attitude was born out of survival -- a determination fueled by the void in his household. He put himself through college and feverishly studied the martial arts. Soon he was teaching science by day while operating karate schools at night. In between he always had side hustles: real estate, sports memorabilia, antiques you name it. Those paid the bills, but he wasn't satisfied. The fight game was his 🥊 and he almost lost it all chasing the dream.

Kickin' Flicks 📺: The SHOWTIME film *Tough Guys* (2017) was inspired by my father's life story chasing his dream of creating the sport of Mixed Martial Arts (MMA) in 1979. If you're into MMA, check it out on iTunes.

He was a master pitchman and negotiator, but more than anything he was the quintessential tough guy. I wanted to follow in my dad's footsteps 🦶. At some level, I was channeling my Grandfather's courage and moxie. In retrospect, my dad's success was paying homage to his father who never got the chance to see his potential. My father created his own way and vowed to protect me from the struggles he faced. It planted a seed.

Sensei is a guardian. He wanted to give his children a better life, and sacrificed to give us that opportunity. His kids, all of whom earned their black belts, found success through his methods: two doctors, one lawyer and one teacher with a Master's in Education. They entered the real world with no college debt, a gift from *Sensei*, and a strong family support system. Each won a round of *Sensei Says*. I however, the first born, took the road less traveled 🛣️.

“Sensei Says be a politician.” Of course I followed orders and graduated Summa Cum Laude, naturally, with a bachelor’s degree in Political Science. Gradually I began to second guess my decisions, but stayed on course. *Sensei Says* was starting to frustrate me 😞. My passion was filling his shoes as a “Sensei,” yet my aspirations went ignored. After college, “Sensei Says go to law school.” For the first time in my life, I didn’t listen. I stood still 😐. My father’s emotions echoed Vito Corleone, “I worked my whole life, I don’t apologize, to take care of my family. And I refused to be a fool dancing on a string held by all of those big shots. I don’t apologize, that’s my life, but I thought that when it was your time, that you would be the one to hold the strings. Senator Corleone. Governor Corleone.” It was as if the script was written about our relationship. He quoted those lines to me in jest a hundred times, but a hundred times I refused.

Kickin’ Flicks 📺: Vito “Don” Corleone is quoted from The Oscar winning *The Godfather* (1972). At nearly 50 years old, its lessons of loyalty, respect, family and power are timeless. Many critics hold it as the single greatest piece of cinema. Go; download and stream it. Better yet, get some friends together and have a gangster themed party. @ 177 minutes though, keep in mind that good things come to those who wait.

I took a leap of faith and moved to Los Angeles to learn the entertainment biz 📺. What?!? I wanted to be a promoter just like my *Sensei*, and thought Hollywood 🎬 was the ticket. I knew absolutely nothing about the industry, so my friends and family were skeptical to say the least. Fake it till you make it, right? I borrowed my dad’s swagger and walked in like I owned the place. I had instant success. Confidence is contagious, there is no other explanation. SAG card in hand, I worked with A-listers; everyone from Britney Spears to Arnold Schwarzenegger, and all along the way, despite my decision, no one was prouder of me than my father. I knew a conventional job wasn’t for me.

I've accumulated a treasure trove of experiences in my own right, but I still listen to what *Sensei* has to say. At 72 years old, my dad has seen the highest of highs, creating a new sport with all its fanfare, and the lowest of lows, seeing that billion dollar 🏆 dream slip through his fingers. He's won, lost and finished everywhere in between. He's war-torn and softened a bit, but the glimmer remains. Over time, *Sensei's* commands have become less authoritative and more suggestive. The game evolved; *Sensei* was not just as a disciplinarian or instructor, but now an advisor, a mentor and my *consigliere*. It's a new level of the game.

I've been blessed to wear many hats in my 42 years on earth as a serial entrepreneur, ever since flipping baseball cards in the 6th grade. I've been self-employed and self-assured ever since. Whether it's working with 5-year olds struggling with autism or hosting UFC legend Royce Gracie in my hometown, I've seen and done it all in the martial arts industry. Outside karate, I'm diversified: I dabble in the equity game, real estate, and stock market. I've been a personal trainer, talent scout, and manager. I've authored bestselling books and produced multi-million dollar films alongside Academy Award big wigs. For 20-some years, I promoted the most epic martial arts events in America as President of my own entertainment company [Kumite Classic]. As the boss, I never delegated and always regulated; my blood and sweat lubricated every moving part of the company. Some perks have been glamorous like rubbing elbows with Olympic champions, supermodels and professional athletes, but it wasn't always glitzy. I started in the trenches as a grunt, gutting houses literally littered with 🗑️ at my dad's rentals and labored over endless piles of gravel on construction sites (pro bono mind you), and then continued as a soldier at hundreds of events he produced. I've been the CEO and the janitor across the board, and I have learned to appreciate the process. I've been lucky to be on

the receiving side of major sponsorships and have reciprocated my good fortune by awarding kids college Scholarships. I believe in passing it forward.

Not all jobs are 9-5. During my first year of marriage, I unexpectedly became a 24/7 caregiver. My maternal grandmother, God rest her soul 🙏, was struck with a nasty trifecta: Parkinson's disease, Dementia, and Alzheimer's after a stroke. Sad, frustrating and depressing, it tested every bit of my mettle as she died holding my hand 😞.

I grew up fast in general -- an independent latch-key kid (Gen-Xer) from a broken family (my parents divorced when I was a toddler). Although my mom and dad mixed like oil and water, I was an emulsifier: Mom, nurturing, Godly, and compassionate; Dad, practical, savvy, and responsible. I was a well-blended and blessed to have two amazing role models.

Still, as my resume continues to evolve, only one title truly defines me—SENSEI. As the oldest child of five siblings, and the only boy, it seems as if I was preordained to be the next *Sensei*, although my father never wanted the stress to fall on my shoulders. I've accepted the immense responsibilities that come with my new title, and vow to be the shoulder to 🙏 on, the sincere advisor, and the honest counselor. I promise to educate with a calm voice of reason and firm hand.

Today I'm raising my own clan. On August 17, 2010, my wife Jennifer gave birth to a precious 9lb 5oz baby girl, Gabriella Capri Viola. It was a game changer.

Sensei Says 🙏: My daughter is a member of Gen Z: (1995-2015). This book is dedicated to you guys, so don't make the same mistakes as those pesky millennials (my younger sisters) did 😊.

William Viola IV would follow September 23, 2017. It wasn't until I became a father myself that I fully understood the depth of *Sensei Says*. The cliché "someday you'll understand," had come

to light, and his version of tough love clicked. *Sensei* was tough because he had to be, and the hard exterior complemented hard decisions; decisions that hold your kid's future in the balance—heavy. While I'm not quite as brash as my dad, some say I'm more diplomatic in my approach, I've accepted my calling. The truth is, being a *Sensei* isn't for everyone, but everyone needs a *Sensei*. The ceremonial torch has been passed, and a family tradition continues. How we approach the game may be slightly different, but our end-game is the same—confidence. It's finally my turn to call the shots and I 🙏 each day for the wisdom to give the right “instructions” in this crazy game. My parents believed in me, and now I will do the same. Deep down Gabby and Will have what it takes, but it will take all they got!

I'm obviously proud of my biological family, but I'm equally attached to my extended “karate family.” Countless students from all walks of life have entrusted me with their well-being, and I've felt the heartache 💔 and optimism 😊 of tens of thousands more that my father has touched. Since being my dad's apprentice from day one, I've been exposed to the all the good, the bad and the ugly in people. That experience gave me a knack for judging character. I had no choice but to become wise beyond my years. For as long as I can remember I've been the resident psychologist, mediator, principal, therapist, father figure, and everything in between (playing the good guy and bad guy), from kids battling depression to adults overcome by jealousy. I didn't fully comprehend the power of my position until a 10-year-old student confided in me that they were suicidal; while I was able to talk him off the ledge, it was sobering 😞. Over the past half-century, my family's brand of self-defense has camouflaged life's most important lessons and it really made me think. They may sign a waiver to punch and

kick, but what they're really investing in is a mentor. I had an epiphany 🤔; why not share my experiences with an even larger family—YOU and the millions of other “blunder kids” who are lacking someone to give it to ‘em straight.

I work with thousands of teenage students and I'm amazed how easily they can fall apart when mom and dad aren't there to hold their hand. I'm not knocking them, they have been 📶 “connected” since birth, it's all they know - but when the wifi drops, panic sets in. There is a big difference between being smart and being quick (able to adapt), so my mission is to prepare Gen Z to be more self-sufficient. Whether it's balancing your checkbook or handling a traffic stop, there isn't an industry type that hasn't set foot in the dojo to give me the scoop, so all the resources were at my disposal. CommonSensei was born.

I know that was a bit long winded, but I didn't want to gloss over my journey. I wanted you to feel my emotional investment; it is the soul 🤍 of this book.

Now that you've gotten to know me, let's get to the meat and potatoes. CommonSensei was created out of necessity to be the streetwise self-help coach for Generation Z: 1 part motivation, 2 parts determination, all the common sense missing from the education system. Your manual is chock full of tips on how to set goals, “apply” knowledge, and find your “way.” I'm here to offer insight on all the skills they forgot to teach you 🧠. Every chapter in this book is based on real stories and testimonial from students, friends, and colleagues that I've been blessed to bond and connect with through my marital arts adventures.

As your CommonSensei, I welcome you into my *dojo* of empowerment and present you with the ceremonial white belt. Each rank level serves to train, educate, and encourage you along your journey towards a black belt in common sense 🎓. Are you ready to win at life?

Sensei Says, "Let's kick some ass."

 **BOW**

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