

**CHAPTER**  
**12****Section 4****PRIMARY SOURCE** **A Samurai Instructs His Son**  
by Hojo Shigetoki

*In 1247 Hojo Shigetoki, a leading samurai in Japan, gave his 18-year-old son a set of instructions after the Kamakura shoguns appointed the son to a key position. What advice did the father give his son?*

The men under your command . . . must be carefully chosen for your service. Do not take “difficult” fellows. If men under your orders, however loyal, are wanting in intelligence, you must not trust them with important duties, but rely upon experienced older men. If you are in doubt refer to me, Shigetoki.

In dealing with subordinates do not make an obvious distinction between good and not-good. Use the same kind of language, give the same kind of treatment to all, and thus you will get the best out of the worst. But you yourself must not lose sight of the distinction between good character and bad character, between capable and incapable. You must be fair, but in practice you must not forget the difference between men who are useful and men who are not. Remember that the key to discipline is fair treatment in rewards and in punishments. But make allowance for minor misdeeds in young soldiers and others, if their conduct is usually good.

Do not be careless or negligent in the presence of subordinates, especially of older men. Thus do not spit or snuffle or lounge about on a chest with your legs dangling. This only gives men the impression that you do not care for their good opinion. Preserve your dignity. If you behave rudely, they will tell their families and gossip will spread.

You must treat all servants with proper consideration and generosity, not only your own people but also those of your parents and other superiors. If you do not, they will scorn you and say to one another: “He thinks he is very important, but he doesn’t amount to much.”

Remember, however, that there are times when a commander must exercise his power of deciding questions of life or death. In those circumstances since human life is at stake you must give most careful thought to your action. Never kill or wound a man in anger, however great the provocation. Better get somebody else to administer the proper punishment. Decisions made in haste before your feelings are calm can only lead to remorse. Close your eyes and reflect carefully when you have a difficult decision to make.

When accusations are brought to you, always remember that there must be another side to the question. Do not merely indulge in anger. To give fair decisions is the most important thing not only in commanding soldiers but also in governing a country.

from George Sanson, ed., *A History of Japan to 1334* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1958), 336. Reprinted in Peter N. Stearns, ed., *Documents in World History*, Vol. 1 (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1988), 144.

**Activity Options**

1. **Writing for a Specific Purpose** Make a list of *dos* and *don'ts* for Hojo Shigetoki's son based on this selection. Share your list with classmates.
2. **Creating Oral Presentations** With a partner, role-play a conversation between Hojo Shigetoki and his son in which you discuss how a military leader ought to behave.