

JAPAN'S BELOVED COMPANIES



RECOMMENDED BY RYU MURAKAMI, THIS MOVING BOOK INCLUDES THE STORY OF A SPECIAL CHALK COMPANY. PRIME MINISTER HATOYAMA HIMSELF WAS FILLED WITH SO MUCH ADMIRATION FOR THIS COMPANY THAT HE VISITED THE FIRM HIMSELF, EVENTUALLY INTRODUCING IT IN THE COURSE OF DELIVERING A PUBLIC POLICY SPEECH.

The book enjoyed glowing coverage in the media as a “business book that makes you cry.” It won high praise in Asahi Shimbun’s section titled, “Books that are Selling,” in Nihon Keizai Shimbun’s “The Insider’s Guide to Bestsellers,” in R25’s “The R25 Book Review,” in the magazine AERA, in TBS’s television programs, “Sunday Japan” and “Hiroshi Kume’s ‘That Thing Called TV!,’” in Fuji TV’s “News Japan,” in TV Tokyo Channel 12’s “World Business Satellite,” in TBS Radio’s “Access,” in Nippon Cultural Broadcasting’s “This Morning’s Cold Cuts with Tetsuya Takeda,” BS 11’s “Bestseller BOOK TV,” in Mainichi Shimbun, Sankei Shimbun, Shizuoka Shimbun, Hokkaido Shimbun, Nikkei MJ, and the Weekly Diamond.

In the first part of the book, the author states that corporate management is an activity for fulfilling missions and responsibilities for five entities. Taking this concept into account, he goes on to establish five objectives of management as follows.

1. *Make employees and their families happy*
2. *Make subcontractors and the employees of subcontractors happy*
3. *Make clients happy*
4. *Revitalize local communities and make their members happy*
5. *Make shareholders happy*

Many books on management claim that a company belongs to shareholders. In fact, when discussing “who owns a company,” the dominant thinking is that “a company is owned by shareholders,” and when discussing management objectives, “customer satisfaction” and “the maximization of shareholder value” are brought up as the obvious objectives.

However, the author claims that all such books misunderstand the point. He asserts that the company does not exist for customers and clients, nor does it exist for shareholders. Only when employees feel joy and are actually happy can a company even begin to make its customers happy. By extension, only after a company becomes capable of providing happiness to its customers can it expect to see its profits rise and consequently make its shareholders happy.

Therefore, the happiness of shareholders is not an end itself, but instead, a byproduct — this is the author’s assertion.

With “Japan’s Most Beloved Companies” appearing in the second section, many executives and office staff should find this must-have book very enlightening. It conveys stories from the heart and resonates on a deep level, explaining the meaning of work and the meaning of a company’s reason for being.

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Author Profile

KOJI SAKAMOTO



After completing his tenures as a professor at Fukui Prefectural University and Shizuoka University of Art and Culture, the author, Kouji Sakamoto, has served since 2008 in multiple roles, including professor at the Hosei Graduate School of Regional Policy Design (Graduate school for studies in regional building, manager of the Graduate School of Hosei University's Shizuoka Satellite Campus, and professor at the Hosei Business School of Innovation Management (MBA).

He also holds numerous other posts, including Chairman of the Small and Medium Enterprise Agency's Committee for Evaluating Management Innovation, while being a member of councils and committees of national, prefectural, municipal institutions, and the Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

His expertise lies in Management Theory for Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises, Regional Economy Theory, and Industrial Theory.

The author has many other titles to his credit, including "Japan's Beloved Companies Part 2 (ASA Publishing)," "The State of the Yiwu Business in China," "Services that Touched My Heart," "Exploration of the Citizen Factor in Consumption," "Chosen Major Companies, Abandoned Major Companies," "The History of Regional Industries (preceding titles published by Doyoukan)," and "Why This Company Continues to Make Smooth Advances (KANKI PUBLISHING)."

JAPAN'S BELOVED COMPANIES

**“ WE WANT TO MAKE A PLACE,
WHERE HANDICAPPED PEOPLE ARE PRAISED,
NEEDED, AND MAKE A GOOD CONTRIBUTION FOR
SOCIETY. ”**

Nihon Rikagaku Kougyo.inc (NRK) (Japan Physics and Chemistry Industry.inc)

50 years ago, 2 mentally handicapped girls joined the workforce of Nihon Rikagaku Kougyo.inc (NRK), due to the effort of employees at that time who stated, “we will all support them”. Today, over 70% of NRK's workforce is handicapped in some way.

A company does not exist just for sales and profit, it exists to be truly needed by people, and for the employee to be proud of working for the company. As a result, we can all feel happiness, we run our company to be a company like this.

The Companies With 70% Handicapped Employees

Established in 1937, NRK is located at KANAGAWA in Japan, a very calm environment close to the TAMA River. I would like to introduce NRK as one of Japan's beloved and most respectable companies. NRK is an unassuming company employing on average only 50 people and producing dust-free chalk within a factory setting. Nonetheless, it chose a trailblazing path which today has resulted in 70% of its workforce being employed from the handicapped community and an enviable bond which comes from over 50 years of striving and mutual support between the company and its handicapped employees. As with most simple but profound changes the story begins with a degree of humble tenacity and some philosophical musing.

One day in 1959, a teacher from a school for mentally and physically handicapped children close by made a visit to NRK, which was located in Oota-ku Tokyo at that time. “I work as teacher in a school for handicapped children,

I know it is difficult for you but I have come to ask you for employment for some of the handicapped kids who will be graduating this year. I know that there is limited employment of handicapped people in big companies, but I would love you to employ our kids in your company". She asked specifically that 2 handicapped girls from the school be considered for employment. Yasuhiro Oyama, the president of NRK (an executive director that time) was left greatly tormented by this request.

"If we employ these 2 girls, will our company have the capacity to keep them happy in their work and life?" When Mr Oyama questioned himself deeply, he could not have complete confidence that the company could be responsible for them. Based on this conclusion Mr Oyama told her, "I understand your situation, but it is not possible in our company, I am very sorry". However the teacher did not give up on the first try and returned to NRK to petition Mr Oyama a second time, but he again declined. At the third visit the teacher did not wish to make Mr Oyama any more troubled so finally she gave up, but made of him the following request, "I know this is asking too much and I will not ask again for them to be employed, but could you please give them work experience? Otherwise they will never know the pressure and the happiness of working as they will be living their whole lives in the institution for handicapped people and would normally die much younger than an able bodied person".

Mr Oyama was so moved by her words, delivered bent with her forehead to the ground, that he promised to give the 2 girls work experience at NRK.

We Will All Take Care of Them.

On his promise of work experience being given it was not just the girls who were glad, their parents and teachers were also very happy and pleased about it. The day would start at 8am and finish at 5pm, but whenever there was rain or strong winds, the girls came to work at 7AM in the morning everyday and would wait at the entrance with their father and mother, often with a worried teacher in tow. Their parents would come to see them working from a distance at around 3pm, caring and apprehensive enough to want to make sure that the girls were not falling down or creating trouble intentionally or otherwise.

Meanwhile a week passed, and one day before the work experience finished, more than 10 employees surrounded Mr Oyama and told him "we need to talk"

"About the 2 girls, whose work experience ends tomorrow, please employ them as regular workers from the next working term. Please do not leave them with just one work experience, if there is something they cannot do we will all support them, please employ them as regular workers". The employees said that this was their consensual wish as the girls had been working so hard from morning to the end of the work day it had moved their hearts. Granted their job of labelling the product was simple, but when they worked the girls did not take their break at 10am, lunchtime, or 3PM unless somebody tapped on their shoulder to tell them "its lunchtime" or "we are finishing today's work". The workers said they looked so happy and worked hard for all their worth.

Everybody Wants to be Helpful to Somebody.

In response to the employees Mr Oyama decided to employ the girls as regular workers. He employed both of them because he thought it would be a pity to employ just one girl, he reasoned it would make her lonely at work and he also thought if they are together they can help each other. Although this began NRK's drive to begin employing more handicapped people, there was one thing that Mr Oyama still could not really understand. He thought that the quiet and carefree life at the institution sounded better than working everyday at a factory. But at times when the handicapped employees were not listening to what he said, or made a mistake, he would ask "do you want to go back to the institution?" On hearing this they were adamant such a thing was against their will.

One day when he was at a Buddhist memorial service he consulted a monk on his thoughts. The monk told

him, "that is so natural, do you know that there are 4 elements within Happiness? These are 1; to be loved, 2; to be praised, 3; to be helpful, 4; to be needed. Within these 4, 2; to be praised, 3; to be helpful, and 4; to be needed cannot be obtained by those living in an institution. These 3 elements of happiness can be realised and obtained through working, therefore all kinds of people have a desire to work. A carefree life at the institution or at home just watching TV does not lead to happiness. True happiness comes from work." Mr Oyama had not been thinking of work in this context, but the monk's advice led him to this understanding. Like Mr Oyama many people have not realised this truth, but he himself has seen it in the diligent attitude and happiness of his handicapped employees towards their work.

At around this time Mr Oyama saw Mr Toshio Nishiyama on TV, a man who works at UENO zoo as a director and was fondly nicknamed KABA-ENCYO (the hippopotamus director of the zoo). Mr Nishiyama was on this programme stating that, "recently, animals in the zoo are no longer raising their own young, I thought about the reason for this and it looks like having been fed in a cage for so long, they have lost the instinct of raising their own young." On hearing this, Mr Oyama thought, "it seems the animals in the zoo have lost their instinct for living", and this made him very shocked.

For Mr Oyama these 2 understandings made him realise that for human being's 'living' means to be needed at work, earning and becoming independent individuals. If this was the case, he surmised providing a place that would meet these needs and facilitate this was the responsibility of the company and its very reason for existence. As a result, NRK has been employing handicapped people for the last 50 years.

We Do Not Make People Follow The Machine Process, The Machine Process Follows The Person.

At the beginning there was continuous trouble and hardship from employing handicapped people, Mr Oyama did not even know how to start teaching them the work. Normally people follow the factory line process, but Mr Oyama changed the production process, specifically involving the machines, tools, and parts in order to tailor the process to the individual and allow each of them to reach their full potential at work.

The following observation led to a possible start to the teaching process, "These kids walk from their house to work or they sometimes come by bus, but either way they pass through the traffic lights, this means they can distinguish colours. Well, they can use this ability at work "

As the product is chalk there are many colours that can be utilized, for example the container of the materials which pass through the factory line can be represented with the same colour as the materials themselves. Furthermore if there is somebody who cannot read numbers, they can use a colour coded weight of the value needed and follow these instructions, "the materials in the blue container should be mixed with the amount measured by the blue weight." To teach them how long the machine should be running, measure the amount of time the machine requires to run, and make a sand glass specifically for the running time of that machine. Then, place the sand glass where it is obvious to see and tell them "turn round this sand glass when you switch on the machine, and when all the sand falls down, you stop the machine." This way they can operate the machine by following your instructions.

Mr Oyama started to understand that if you think about the job in the context of their abilities, and if the work is tailored to the individual, their output can be maximized and they would be producing as much as the able bodied employees. In this way he has been coming up with various ideas to keep peak efficiency, while employing handicapped people into the company for the last 50 years.

The employment of a handicapped person depends on the following standards; he/she can take care of him/herself, are able to reply, are able to try their best, and will not make any trouble for others. Applicants that are able to meet these criteria are very gentle souls, therefore, if they reach a certain level of work experience, giving them a position of leadership will increase their motivation.

The Reality That Many Companies Are Escaping From

There is an obligation designated by the law that companies must employ a certain percentage of handicapped people. In Japan this law has been fixed since 1967 for physically handicapped people and since 1987 for mentally handicapped people. If you think about this difference in date, you can understand how respectable NRK is. I have been impressed by Mr Oyama's will and that is why I introduced this company as one of Japan's beloved companies.

Those companies which are not able to achieve the handicapped people's employment percentage, are required to make a payment. Despite this there are just 42% of companies in Japan achieving the figure designated by the law. The best place is OITA county's 55.6%, the worst is TOKYO county's 27% .There are 60% of Japanese companies that do not put any effort into employing handicapped people and choose just to make the payment. We call our age "the age of the heart", "the age of humans" and "the age of minorities", yet 60% of Japanese companies hesitate to employ handicapped people.

I decided to research this as I thought perhaps there are not many handicapped people who currently want to work. I discovered that within the number of handicapped people willing to work after graduation, only 30% could get the employment to do so. This means that 70% of people were willing to work but could not get a job. This situation occurs because many companies prefer making the payment to the Government believing it is more cost effective than attempting to employ handicapped people. Why is it the big companies cannot fulfil these goals when a small company like NRK is going beyond them with just 50 employees?

People Would Think We Are Crazy Too

There is a story about a company that I visited. They employ many handicapped people now, but this story was at a time when they employed their first handicapped person. When the president of the company was in the toilet he heard one of his employee's talking, "its because the president employs that handicapped person that people will think we are crazy too, I can't stand it". This person, who had said such an awful thing, was an experienced core employee. The president could not leave the situation as it was so he gathered all the employees during working hours and told them about what he heard in the toilet. He declared strongly, "I cannot believe that one of my employees could ever say such a thing". He also summoned the experienced employee and told him "if you do not make an apology to him (the handicapped person), I want you to leave this company. As part of this company and also as a human, I cannot accept what you said." As a result of this the experienced core employee left the company.

The company now employs 30% of its workforce from the handicapped community and they are trying their best to reach their full potential. However, it would seem there are many companies who share the disgraced employee's feelings, I cannot understand why else there has been no change in the employment figures with regards to handicapped people.

Towards Inventing New Products

NRK currently has a 30% share in the market with its dust-free chalk, its flagship product. However due to the decreasing number of children and the application of information technology, demand for the chalk has been decreasing every year. If NRK did not invent a new product they would be in trouble.

Had it been only handicapped people working on these ideas it would have been difficult to invent a product of merit, however working together with their able bodied colleagues, they circumvented any difficulties that would

hinder the production of an ideal product.

The “KOROBA-ZU” (do not fall down) is a product invented by Mr Oyama, as the name explains, it is a band that stops people slipping when walking down icy roads and other such surfaces. Other new products have included a chalk called “KIT-PASS” which allows you to draw on glass and is easy to erase. When you use this chalk, you get to see outside while you are drawing on the glass window, this is fantastic for a child’s imagination. As the product is easy to erase there is no time consuming mess to anger parents. They are harvesting ideas based on this product, such as a new board for schools, in order to cultivate demand for a new market.

Innovation has been applied not only with new products but also the main flagship product, the dust-free chalk. A new environmentally sound product was developed and added to the product line, a dust-free chalk produced from recycled scallop shells. NRK are trying various innovations to expand their business, this comes from Mr Oyama’s strength of will in wishing to make employment opportunities and positions for handicapped people.

There is Something Consumers Can do

NRK is a small company and as such we should appreciate their achievement and goals more. If we lose this company, many handicapped people will be understandably disappointed, for me to state “BUY Nihon Rikagaku Kougyo” is a reasonable affirmative action that shows my feelings. As an example of the power of affirmative action let us consider the following story. A long time ago a struggling TOYOTA Oriki, (TOYOTA weaving machine company) the parent corporation of TOYOTA, was helped greatly by Businesses in Hamamatsu who banded together to buy their product. Having decided, “that is a good product, so lets buy it together”, their action spread locally and the sheer volume of sales caused the product cost to decrease. This in turn caused a resurgence in product sales for a previously floundering TOYOTA.

MATSUDA the car manufacturing company had been in a difficult position too, while in the process of new development for their rotary engine. However like in the previous example the people of Hiroshima banded together, the consensus was lets support Matsuda, “if we buy a car, lets buy a Matsuda branded car”. This practical action with a communal attitude to “BUY MATSUDA” being at its heart was enough to help Matsuda overcome its troubles. So there is something that can be done directly through consumer power alone, and with this at our disposal I think that we should work so as not to lose companies like NRK.

50 Years of Warm Memories

I once had an experience at NRK which I will never have again. One day while I was visiting NRK and talking with Mr Oyama, as a guest I was given a cup of coffee by an old lady. She said to me in a whisper “welcome Sir, please drink this cup of coffee”, and she then took back the tray. After she left, Mr Oyama told me, “She is the one I told you about before, do you remember? She was the first employee.” She was one of the handicapped girls who had been employed by the company 50 years ago. She was 15 years old on joining the company so would be 65 years old now, I remember her back was vented and her hair was white.

It has been 50 years now that she has been working for NRK and has been surrounded with warm hearted people such as Mr Oyama and her colleagues. Many things had happened in the past and they had shared both good times and hard times. Everything started with the visit of the teacher from the local school for the handicapped, the subsequent decision made by Mr Oyama and all the respect from her colleagues had its roots in that single event. There were many things that happened from there. I imagined the weight of all the time that had passed, and could not stand the loss of my tears.

Despite retiring having reached 60 years old, she had continued working as a contractor doing miscellaneous duties. This was made possible by a policy at NRK stating that employees may work until the age of 65 as

contractor if they wish. After she had brought me the coffee, I went down to the factory floor and noticed her there making chalk for all her worth.

Mr Oyama was no longer worried about taking care of all the handicapped employees any more. Here was a man standing before me, who has been living as he believes for the past 50 years, with confidence and a warm smile which showed his empathy for the problems of other's.

I have visited many companies and can tell that at NRK even the able bodied employees are very cheerful. I queried Mr Oyama, "Why do the employees of NRK all look so lively and cheerful? Why do they look so full of confidence?" Mr Oyama answered, "I think, it is because they think they are contributing something to society. We are a small company, but the employees are taking pride in working together, supporting the weak, and being useful to society. This motivates them to be lively and cheerful."

The Company That Gives Joy to The Families of The Employees

I have been writing several articles about NRK in newspapers and magazines, and wrote about the time I had met one of the first handicapped employees on being given my coffee. We do not know if she understood the significance or not, but Mr Oyama showed her the article and told her, "give this article to your mother". As a 65 year old lady her mother would have been around 90 years old. When her mother saw the article she responded with an unbroken letter to Mr Oyama.

I was impressed, "when the mother of a 65 year old is still living, you can believe she has a strong will to see her daughter happy before she allows herself to pass on". On the same night I could not sleep because I kept imagining the mother really wishing for her daughter's happiness from deep down and exhausting herself in this pursuit. Therefore I was very surprised when Mr Oyama later told me, "the mother was so happy about this article praising her daughter, in fact it was the mother that was most pleased."

The Will Conveyed From One Generation to The Next

NRK had been established by Mr Oyama's father, making his son the company's second president. Before the idea of working for NRK arose, Mr Oyama had initially wanted to be a teacher, having had the relevant qualifications and been accepted by a school. His father however became sick and was unable to work and NRK was close to bankruptcy, Mr Oyama therefore decided to take over NRK. When I first heard this story, I said to him "you are the teacher now, far better than any school teacher could be!"

Much time has passed, with Mr Oyama now being over 70 years old it is almost time for NRK to be passed on to the next generation. Happily, Mr Oyama's son is 38 years old and highly motivated. There is always some discussion about successions following the family line, but for Mr Oyama's son who grew up seeing his father's high resolution it will be second nature.

In my opinion the transition would be better if the successor is aged between 35 to 45 years old, 30 would be too young, and at the age of 50 you would be too old. The president should change between the ages of 65 to 70 years old, 70 being the limit allowed for a president to finish their duties. This should stand even if there is no decrease in the president's knowledge and abilities. In other words what I am saying is it is better to retire at a time when the president still has a high ability, good personality, and wide breadth of knowledge. It would be the best timing for both the president and the successor, facilitating a smooth transition and keeping the company running at peak performance.

Being Considerate of The Kindness of Others

As part of my work I have visited many companies, some of them refuse to meet me because they are busy. Mr Oyama on the other hand is always welcoming people who want to visit NRK at any time, no matter the inconvenience or how busy he may be. This is because he wishes to convey his personal resolve for the general employment of more handicapped people.

There is one story I cannot forget that illustrates this point perfectly. A group of farming managers, having listened to one of my lectures, wish to visit NRK and so an official organised their visit. Unfortunately the organiser had not done accurate research about the route and we became caught in traffic, despite a promise to arrive at 10AM we were an hour and 15 minutes late. It is important to consider that NRK is a small company so the meeting room is also used as a dining room for the employees. Imagine the inconvenience of us arriving at such a place an hour and 15 minutes late. As our bus arrived I ran over to Mr Oyama, "I am very sorry we are late, please come inside and tell your story on the bus". He asked me why so I said "the meeting room is also the dining room for your employees, if we go there now, they will not be able to eat lunch on time, I cannot stand for that". Mr Oyama replied "that is fine, I have already told them to start their lunch hour at 1PM instead of 12PM. I have told them there are important guests coming here today but they are late because of traffic, I asked them to be patient".

It was our fault for being late not the employees, so I asked Mr Oyama "please change the lunch hour back to normal, I feel sorry for them" he replied "please sir, the change has already been made and they understand, please do not confuse them", in the end, we had the lecture in the dining room. Finally the lecture finished at 12:30 and as we were on the tour of the factory, I overheard a handicapped employee saying to our guide, "we will be eating lunch at 1PM today; I will be hungry by then". The employee had been looking forward to lunch and because of us it would be late. I felt so ashamed and sorry about the predicament and, although it was nobody's fault, I chastised everybody about our irresponsible time keeping during the return journey.

Thinking About What We Can do

When visiting NRK we are always handed something as a gift from their product line, such as their dust-free chalk. All the visitors show their appreciation with a simple 'thank you', but many of them do not realise that this product is for sale and was made by handicapped employees working with all their might. I always wonder if it is right to get a free gift, so I insist that everybody responds in kind to this generous gesture by collecting money on the bus to buy their product. As it costs only about 5 dollars a package it may not yield huge profit to the company when 30 visitors buy their product, but there is no better way to show our appreciation.

Incidentally when I visit NRK I personally bring along some confectionery as a gift. Normally this would be a box of chocolate, candy or biscuits containing more than 50 pieces, this would mean all the employees get some even if it is only a piece each. I have heard that some of the employees take the confectionery back to their home to show to their families. There are however some visitors who do not understand why I am doing this, and bring as a gift a box of confectionery that contains less than 20 pieces. I do not think that they have really considered the best way to show their appreciation.

I often think, "the genuinely weak are those who cannot work even if they want to, those people who do not work when they can, are fake in their claims of weakness." There are people who really want to fight for themselves and are putting the effort into it despite it being difficult for them to do, they are in reality the truly weak. Those people who do not give their full effort are pretending to be weak and I think they do not need to be supported.

Lets consider for example small companies who are often seen to be complaining that "we live in the age of earning differences", "it is the fault of large scale enterprise's" or "we are the victims, we are the weak". Shopkeepers especially have a tendency towards this kind of complaint, the usual line being that the "customer

left our shop because a big supermarket opened close by, we are the victims of these callous supermarkets”.

I sometimes ask these people “are you genuinely weak?” “You are standing on your feet and can walk as freely as you wish, please go see what Mr Oyama and his employees are doing at NRK. Do you still think you are genuinely weak? You can change, you could do something on your own merit before complaining.” These companies who claim to be weak often say, “The government should make some form of state measure to support small companies.” I however think that companies like NRK are the ones that should be supported by the government.

I do not think that complaints from the shopping districts about the problem of vacant shops in the area and the influx of big supermarkets should be justified. Let us consider for example a small shop called SUGIYAMA fruits which I will introduce later in this book. Their shop is located in an inactive shopping district where half of the shops have been closed down. Despite this they are trying their best by applying various ideas and innovations which are actually working. I think that there are too many people who would rather believe the situation is beyond them and are not trying their best yet are complaining that they are victims and weak.

In contrast there are small companies like NRK who are trying their best, realizing various ideas, and working together with the genuinely weak, those that are handicapped. I would like many people to see this and earn a similar reputation, meanwhile, I wish only that Japan’s beloved and respectable companies will increase in number.

The following is a letter written to Mr Oyama by Yasutaka Tsutsui, an elementary school pupil who visited NRK as part of the school’s programme. This letter teaches us much about what we as adults need to show, and should convey, to those who are very impressionable.

*Thank you very much for showing us your company.
I was surprised to know that the chalk we are normally using was based on so many ideas. There are also many handicapped people working very hard there, and I was surprised by them as they have skills which I cannot imitate. When I was learning the process of how the chalk is made, I thought “God is giving a gift to us all”. I felt I should do the best I can and work as hard as the people at the factory. In my presentation I will talk about people working in the factory and how the chalk is made.
Thank you very much for showing and explaining to us these various things at this busy time.*

*11th of November
AOYAMA GAKUIN elementary school
Yasutaka Tsutsui*