



Noriaki Sasaki/The Yomiuri Shimbun

Job seekers need real vision: Entrepreneur

This is the sixth installment of the "Message" series, this time featuring Shinichiro Makino, chief executive officer of used car exporter ENG Inc.

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Some people succeed and some don't after being hired by a major company. At smaller companies too, there are people who become successful and people who don't. This is true no matter what company you work for. What matters is thinking about the kind of job you should do at each stage of your life so that you eventually become the person you wish to be.

That's what I believe from my experience in searching for a job and ensuing business career.

Without an understanding of who you are, and how you want to live, the grass will always be greener on the other side. You'll look at the lives of others with envy.

My parents always told me to go to a good university and get a job at a major company. That idea was imprinted onto the minds of Japan's older generation.

But, in my early teenage years, Japan's bubble economy burst. Many major companies went bankrupt, including Yamaichi Securities Co. The aftermath left a strong impression on me. I was

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keenly aware that nothing would stay unchanged. My two elder brothers took jobs at major companies. One of them has been successful, but the other quit his job because he did not fit into the company's culture. What I saw made me think hard about my future career path.

During that period, I read in a magazine a quote from Kota Matsuda, the founder of Tully's Coffee Japan, where he said, "You have only one shot at life. Rather than doing nothing

and regretting it, push yourself to your limits and accept the consequences, even though you might fail." Matsuda's words prompted me to take a hard look at myself and think about what I should be doing so as not regret it later on, at the end of my life. My answer was to start a business on my own.

When I started looking for a job, I set three conditions for selecting the company where I would work.

Firstly, it should be a small enough organization to allow me to take on responsibilities. Secondly, the work environment should force me to speak English to improve my English proficiency. Thirdly, the company should allow me to work closely with a manager to learn about business management.

Eventually, I got a job with a small used car exporter, where I worked for 3½ years before I left to start my own business.

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MESSAGE Thoughts in English from **Shinichiro Makino**

Being hardworking, courteous is 'not enough to survive'

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Last year, my company posted net sales of ¥11.9 billion, surpassing our sales target. We have been exporting quality used vehicles, mostly to emerging countries, since the founding of ENG in 2008, when we sold just 200 used cars and rang up total sales of ¥600 million. Today, we have the largest share of the used car market in Malaysia, at 20 percent. We aim to boost that rate to 30 percent or 40 percent in the years ahead to enhance our dominant position in the country. To mitigate the risk of overconcentration, we are also looking to other markets like Africa, Indonesia and Thailand.

The reason for my company's rapid growth is the service we provide to accommodate end users' demands based on detailed research we conduct with our customers. This fine-tuned service may be part of my company's efforts to provide Japanese quality, which helps our business make a difference in overseas markets.

The used car business is fast-growing thanks for surging demand in emerging countries. About 1 million used cars are exported from Japan each year, comprising a ¥1 trillion industry.

Unfortunately, very few exporters care

what happens after their cars are sold. They tend to be obsessed with short-term profits. I saw a business opportunity.

From early on, I intended to do business with other countries, particularly in Asia. After the bubble burst in Japan, companies that relied solely on domestic markets struggled. Even now, as the Japanese economy seems to be picking up, the future is uncertain. Taking the country's shrinking population into account, no one knows if businesses will be able to rely exclusively on the domestic market 10 or 20 years from now. Rather than limiting business to the 130 million people in the Japanese market, working with people from all over the world, including the 600 million people who live in ASEAN countries, offers a wealth of new opportunities.

Another observation that prompted me to do business with foreign partners was that, although there was no shortage of Japanese companies looking for opportunities overseas, many fail to understand about how to do business on foreign soil in the eyes of local customers.

To me, Japanese companies, particularly appliance manufacturers, competed unwisely with one another in the domestic market, whittling away their strength. They set out for overseas markets already exhausted and placed a great deal of faith in the quality of their products. No doubt, that quality is good. But they failed to pay attention to local needs because they were overconfident about their reputations. That's how I think Japanese companies have spent the last 10 or 20 years. They kept doing business abroad as if it was a mere extension of what they had done domestically.

South Korean manufacturers such as Samsung and LG, on the other hand, succeeded in localizing their businesses. I think they provide a very good example for us. For instance, the televisions they sold in Muslim countries were equipped with alarms to remind users of prayer times. I think Japanese companies will not survive if they rely solely on the reputations they have built up in the past. The same can be said of the Japanese workforce.

Among my company's 27 employees, there are eight temps, four interns and four non-Japanese people. I'm more than willing to increase the number of non-Japanese. As long as they are forward-looking and share a common goal with our team, I don't care wheth-



Shinichiro Makino in his office at ENG Inc. in Minato Ward, Tokyo

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er my employees are Japanese.

Foreigners often describe Japanese people as hardworking, courteous and serious. But Japanese will not survive the changing business environment on such qualities alone. Something that stood out to me in recent job interviews at my company is the shyness and inward-orientation of Japanese. Students from the Tokyo area in particular tend to lack self-awareness. Because there are so many great companies in the Tokyo area, they have too many choices. They wonder which companies are good, but don't think much about themselves. They tend to have no clear plan for their own lives. Compared to

Japanese students like these, foreign students are more ambitious to move up in society and have a real vision for their lives.

I would like young Japanese job seekers to take a hard look at themselves and come up with a vision of their own. I'd encourage them to think about what kind of life a person should live and say later, "OK, I have no regrets."

In future, my company plans to start purchasing used cars directly from in-

dividuals and retail them in the Japanese market. I'd like to make ENG the No. 1 company in the nation's automobile industry, excluding the automakers themselves.

Interviewer: Keiko Watanabe, Japan News Staff Writer

(In this series, Japan News writers conduct interviews in English and edit interviewee's comments.)

Interviewee's profile

Shinichiro Makino is the chief executive officer of Tokyo-based ENG Inc., an exporter of used cars. Born in 1979

in Tokyo, Makino graduated from Nihon University College of Commerce in 2004. He founded ENG in January 2008.

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