

Part 3
The second stage of my life

(1)

Top management of trucking companies

I was destined to become the second-generation top management in a small trucking firm. As the result, this shift of my life turned to continue some 32 years thereafter. I call this “the second stage of my life.” It would be one of the most époque-making stories about my life. Therefore, I would like to write a little in detail as one of the precious records of my life.

I was then 31 years old. Most of the employees, some twenty or so, were older than I. I was entirely amateur in the trucking and stevedore industry. A young man successor with no experience, as the representative of the firm, needed a courage and strong determination to get it done. The motto of my life as the top manager was “Try to start working earlier than anybody else and work until late more than anybody else”. This continued to be my policy for myself and other managers for their education years after.

Anyhow, I did my best, in a trance so to speak. In those days, we had a bus for sending the workers to the working places, and I drove my own motor bike, which I had been using since I became independent.

I need to tell here about the motor bike that I used in those days. Not like Americans, we were too poor to have a car in those days after the war. I never forget the time I first bought it and had a ride in the street. People watched me driving it, as if they saw an interesting thing with even admiration and envious eyes, and I was proud of it. At least it was a sort of symbol of the top fashion runner.

When I had dates with my wife before marriage that continued some six years, the motor bike was always with us. It was some 40,000 yen half a century ago, more than a monthly salary for ordinary men. It now costs only 50,000 yen, less than one fifth of the monthly salary. It tells how cheap it would be in mass production.

The firm had an old Toyota car for my father-in-law with a hired driver, but has been in a corner of the firm with nobody to use. I used to drive in secrecy with no driving license for fun.

In those days, we had no automatic transmission car. I had a secret of my driving a conventional car with some device on my right knee to make it possible to operate the accelerator and the brake pedals. My right knee is completely paralyzed unable to lift up from the accelerator to the brake pedal, so I developed a spring attached to my right foot from

the above so that when I lose the pushing power on the accelerator pedal the foot easily moves on the brake pedal. At the time I got the driving license, however, I bound a steel plate behind my right knee to prevent the knee bending out of the brake pedal. The steel plate was nothing but a piece of the band saw I was familiar in the past vocation.

Later years, however, modern technology made me no need to try that sort of “invention”. Automatic transmission is the one, which made me able to use right foot on the accelerator and the left foot on the brake.

Coming back to the story of the early stage of my new business, we had a veteran superintendent manager, Toku-san by the nickname, used to say to me, “Yoshida-san, I will help you to become a good top manager.” He used to be a boatswain of a 15,000-ton cargo freight traveling throughout the world. Ironically, as time goes on, he became to be unable to catch up with the time changes. I said to him, “Toku-san, you helped me to become a better top manager. It’s time for me to make a good superintendent-graduate to be proud of yourself to others.”

Our firm became much bigger in the number of workers and annual sales. In the process of its growth, he seemed to be outdated. He sometimes seemed to be at a loss what to do to the change of times, but I helped him somehow or others with my possible help and encouragement to him. I let him work until he died. In the funeral, I made a condolence address with no text in hand, as if I spoke to him alive.

I sure had countless stories of hardship, especially as a second-generation top manager. The story of reformation by the hands of the non-blood top manager was one of them. Those experiences later years became the backbone of my playing a business consultant after the 32-year of the second stage of my life to the third stage of my life, which comes far after this.

The second or the third generation of the top management of the family dominated firm is the one that comes out of the two. The one is that the top becomes either the type of “maintain the status quo” or the type of “entrepreneurial businessperson” to make the firm bigger than the founder made.

In my case, I have no blood connection with the father-in-law, the entrepreneurial founder. If I were to point out something for business potentiality in my blood, I would say, my father’s ancestor was samurai, nothing to do with business. I did succeed his dexterousness, however, which is a good element for a logical way of thinking and behavior. While from my mother blood, I succeeded the generated spirit of the invention.

It is unavoidable for the family oriented enterprise that the top management is apt to become emotionally dependent. In my case, however, I came into the family from the outside, which means no emotional dependence or excuse was allowed. If the business goes well, the appreciation went to the founder, not the successor. As a man of succeeding the founder, some sort of constrain worked to the founder family. He or she would try to make the business successful so that the family would appreciate.

Businesses in Kyoto, Japan, are famous for their system of selecting the next generation top management in the family's daughter's husband instead of the son. This comes from the fact that the possible choice of selecting the next generation top management from an entirely different blood could be expected.

The top management II or III has a problem. It is the gap of the age between the top and the employees. The young top finds it hard to manage the elder workers. Some try to leave the elders some way or other so that he could manage the workers at his will much easier than to the elders. It may seem OK, but such rough labor management is liable to invite troubles and grudge, sometimes driving them to make the labor union to protect themselves.

However, I never took the latter way of management even though I was almost the youngest and the second generation with no family blood. I took the strategy of what is called "reformation with no blood". If I were to tell its stories, there would be no limit to stop.

One of the reformations was to change the basic attitude or thought of the employees. Japan was in the process of high economy development after the war. The Korean War and the Vietnam War escalated the growth of the Japanese economy. There came out the serious manpower shortage problem with higher pay raises every year as if no stopping. Workers became too strong so that they came to have no attitude or awareness of "being employed", but rather came to have a notion of "we are kind enough to work for you. So pay us more or we would move to a better paid company"

You know, as an English language learner myself, and having opportunities of associating with American friends and people in my early stage of life, I have better and wider view and notion as to what are going on in America and other countries. Especially the relationship between the employers and employees are different from ours. In America, for instance, a single word of the boss' "You are fired!" works OK, while never in Japan. This difference comes from the unemployment rate. Japan was in the midst of "perfect employment", meaning the jobless rate is zero. It was like a

paradise for workers with no worry for their employment. If dissatisfied with the pay, they could turn over any time.

Many of the Japanese top managements, especially medium and small enterprises, were reluctant to educate their employees too much with the fear, they might quit the company. Everything was derived from the fact that the perfect employment gave the workers to find the place to work with no worry.

In other words, it came from “the imbalance of manpower supply”, the shortage of manpower was it. The situation in the western and American manpower market was so different from Japanese. I knew it more than any other top managements.

Therefore, I tried to make a check in this field, trying to let the worker truly understand what the labor market would be. This does not mean that I turned to be a harsh, cold blooded top management to the workers, but aimed at “the mutual and equal-footing labor and management relationship”.

Ironically, this develops to the problem of facing the birth of labor union, which I would like to write next.