

Part 3
The second stage of my life

(2)

Labor union born Turned to be modern top management

There came a time the then Department of Transportation made a new regulation rule that any trucking firm should be incorporated with the minimum capital of 6-million yen. Our firm turned to be “Incorporated Company”. My status turned to “Company President” from “Firm Representative”.

As the company becomes big in scale and sales, came in the workers’ mind that their company became as big as to have a labor union.

Our company’s customers were big companies, including Cola and cement manufacturers. They had their own labor unions. Our workers were accustomed to watch the labor union's activities of the customer companies, which later years became a motivation for them to organize their union.

In accordance to the customer’s plan of a new logistics base construction some hundred kilometer apart, there came out a possibility of minimizing the number of trucks and drivers. This lead the worker organizes the labor union.

It was the first time for me to face the labor union, but I tried my best so that they feel at ease with no worry for the layoff. My effort of talking with the president of the union in person made the solution to dismiss the union.

It was only a year after this that, again, they organized a union, which has a strong background of the leftist sect. Our company was in a position where we had to expand hauling capacity by having the more trucks and hiring more drivers with their more working hours. On the other hand, as mentioned before, we had a problem of cutting off the number of trucks and drivers after the customer’s logistics base come into operation.

One night, I invited the union’s president into my car for a talk with nobody interference and with no chance for him to escape from me. I said to him, “Don’t you see I am working early from morning until more than anybody in this company? I never leave my office until the last driver returns. You know that! I use my money and time and my body and life and everything for the company and for you the workers! What else do you want me to do!?” This was indeed something that could be said only by a top management man who, as mentioned before, had a policy of “start to work earlier than anybody and work until later than anybody else”.

It was not until that night that he came to meet me with his head deeply down and said to me, “I am so sorry for troubling you. I would like to take the responsibility for this

by resigning the company.” We shook firmly each other with tears and departed.

Years later, the news came into my ears that he opened a small business for his own. The union leaders have as good a potentiality as a businessperson.

For a top management, the labor union is something that is not welcomed as a counter negotiator. I gave them a chance to make the labor union two time, and each time I brought it down. I used to know some businesspersons say openly that if the labor union ever comes out, he or she would close the company. The labor union is that tough and hard to get along and negotiate with.

People may say Yoshida is that much loved by the labor union (laugh). Or, some may say that there was some problem about the labor working and pay condition or mistrust to the top management. I have no intention of protecting myself, but I was well aware that as the company grows big, the workers begin to think it is a good time for them and for the third people viewpoint to organize the union. In fact, as far as the pay standard is concerned, we are running as one of the top ranking companies.

One more thing if I were to emphasize the reason of the labor union coming out, I must point out the fact our customers are all big companies with labor unions. This made our workers feel that the customers understand their union activity and what was worse, they believed that our customers never throw away our company, even if the go on a strike.

As a newcomer top management with modern thought and progressive attitude toward everything, I tried to persuade the aged directors, especially my mother-in-law, the widow of the deceased founder, that we need to have time to sit and talk with the workers for negotiation even though we had no labor union. However, they stood on the position that such negotiation opportunity accelerates them to organize the union. “Do not let them gather in a group. Let them be separated” was the old person's idea.

I escaped to force to make my technical skill of negotiating with them straight with the risk of quarreling with the old headed classical minded directors on the issue. My motto was always to make “revolution without blood”.

A Japanese proverb says, “What it happens, it happens three times.” The third time, the labor union was born. It was in March 1972. It was late at night, when I returned home, I went to the Okonomi-yaki restaurant in the neighborhood. The phone came to me from my wife, who told me that several employees came to see me. I knew by intuition that they organized the real and unbreakable labor union.

They were in so serious a face and presented me a paper that shows the establishment of the union. Only by looking at the cover of the document, I said to them simply, "I've got it" with no other words. They said simply "Yoroshiku", meaning in Japanese, "Please so and so...." I shook my head to let them go. It was like a movie scene.

I accepted the union with the Japanese saying of "What comes the third time is real one". Strange to say, I became so clear and wide in mind and heart. I said to myself, "Well, our company has become big enough to have the real living labor union. OK, if that is what it means, I will challenge to become the modern top management to be proud of the up-to-date labor and management relationship."

In fact, for the following twenty years, I have done a good amount of work as the top management not to be ashamed of. It would be a good story about the modern labor and management relationship. It would be quite a good story if I write on the title of "The history of our labor union". In fact, during my presidency, I was awarded in the essay contests three times in this field. The one is under the title of "the labor safety management of our company", "the labor safety management and corporate management" and "Hungry spirit—meetings with new business chances"

If I were to explain what we, the labor and management, experienced in those last twenty years, it would be something like the followings. We have never made any trouble to our customers by any strikes or the like caused by trouble between labor and management. And above all anything, we have never made fatal accident in our history. This, we believe, would be the decoration worthy for us to be proud of to the society."

I used to have visits by top managements who asked me how to get along with the labor union or how to bring it out. I played a good and well experienced teacher to them.

I thus built a modern labor-management relationship. It happened that Mr. Shouichi Tanabe, then best well known business consultant and CEO of Tanabe Management, Inc., strongly emphasized three points needed for the top management to succeed. He wrote and said that, in order for a top management to succeed in business, he or she has to accept three baptisms, that is, "tax evasion, labor union and bankruptcy"

The tax evasion seems not favorable. When we think of the fact that the most of the real profit goes to tax, the new investment in equipments needs sometimes a rough way of making the needed money.

As for the labor union baptism, I am well experienced in that I brought it out two times and faced the last real one in

success.

As regards the bankruptcy, the third baptism for becoming the top management, I believe it should be interpreted in a way that the top management should challenge that much of risk in order to be a successful top management. If the top management says that he or she has never experienced that hardship of feeling like bankrupting, he or she has never challenged that much of risk taking spirit.

It would be interesting for me to write about my own experiences of being in a bankrupting like situation, which I would write later. That I experienced as what we Japanese call “a bamboo knot”.

As for the tax evasion, I did exactly the opposite. Our company was awarded as “Excellent tax reported corporation” by the tax bureau, which is very rare case, zero point per cent of rareness.