

Women in Charge



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Sakie T. Fukushima, president of
G&S Global Advisors

*In recent years, more and more Japanese women are moving into executive positions in corporate management and international organizations. One good example of this trend is the president of G&S Global Advisors, **Sakie T. Fukushima**, who was a member of the Board of Directors of the international executive search firm Korn/Ferry International, and was the only Japanese named in Business Week's 2008 "The World's 100 Most Influential Headhunters." Fukushima, who was the first woman to serve on the board of such major Japanese companies as Sony and Kao, is now a member of the board of the major tire manufacturer Bridgestone and the leading food producer Ajinomoto. In this interview, she speaks with the Japan Journal's Osamu Sawaji.*

What kinds of changes are occurring in the Japanese business world in terms of perceptions about human resources?

Sakie T. Fukushima: In these last couple of years, Japanese businesses have been pursuing well-qualified individuals regardless of gender, nationality or age. The reason for this is that corporations are realizing that for them to survive in the changing global market, they must make use of a wide variety of people. One of the progressive major consumer electronics manufacturers established a Diversity Promotion Office to get female employees more involved in management. By doing this, the viewpoint of women has become reflected in the development of the company's household products such as washing machines. By infusing female sensibilities into their products,

sales of that company's home appliances have improved. The reason behind this is that the person who usually makes the purchasing decisions regarding such appliances in Japanese households is the wife. Recently, the number of companies that have adopted this type of initiative has increased.

A characteristic of Japanese companies is the lifetime employment system. Has this been changing?

When I first started working in the executive search field at the beginning of the 1990s, the majority of Japanese strongly believed that a corporation was a workplace in which you entrusted your life, so most people were reluctant to change jobs. But recently changing jobs has become more common, and large

corporations have started to hire senior executives from outside.

In my own executive search activities, a major energy company requested me to find female heads for its departments, which led me to assist in hiring Japanese females away from a large beverage manufacturer and a foreign cosmetics producer. One woman who moved from a major department store to being the president of a confectionary producer initiated sales organization reforms to improve the company's performance. Among my personal relationships, there are examples of highly capable women who've switched jobs from the public to private sector, such as the current executive vice president of the major cosmetics manufacturer Shiseido, Kimie Iwata, who moved from the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare, and a current member of the House of Councilors, Yoriko Kawaguchi, who moved from what is now the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry to become a director for the major beverage company Suntory. I think that more and more women will move into important positions in Japanese corporations.

You are a vice chair of the Japan Association of Corporate Executives. What is your role in the Association as the chair of the Committee on Development and Utilization of Human Resources?

The Japan Association of Corporate Executives is putting its efforts into the "development of global human resources." Global human capital constitutes people who can make a difference in the drastically changing global market.

At present, the Committee is compiling proposals for the development of global human resources. We are currently examining the issues by hearing from experts and discussing with the Committee members. Next year, we plan to propose plans that should be implemented at the national, corporate and household levels.

I think global human capital constitutes people who have *gaiju naigo*. In English, the phrase that comes closest to capturing the meaning of this term is "an iron fist in a velvet glove." *Gaiju* is the ability to respond flexibly and tenaciously to diverse values. *Naigo* is strength of convictions that is the core of self-identity. The market is becoming more and more globalized, so corporations must respond to a variety of different values flexibly and tenaciously and survive international competition, so I believe it is imperative that global human capital possesses *gaiju naigo*.

Can you give us an impressive example of a Japanese woman who has *gaiju naigo*?

Japan's national women's soccer team is an excellent example of *gaiju naigo*. Most members of the European and U.S. teams at the World Cup were physically larger than the Japanese members. However, to overcome this physical difference, the Japanese players' strategy was to keep moving and make short passes. That was their *gaiju*. They had a strong conviction not to be defeated. That was their *naigo*. I think it was because the Japanese team had *gaiju naigo* that they were able to become champions at such an important international event. 