

Dialogue with the
Chairperson of the Board**Tadanobu Nagumo**Chairman and Representative Member
of the Board**Ms. Nami Takenaka**Chairperson, Prop Station
(Non-Profit Social Welfare Organization)

Working towards better companies, and a better society, in which everyone can maximize their potential

Ms. Nami Takenaka, who has known Yokohama Rubber Chairman Mr. Tadanobu Nagumo for many years, is the Chairperson of non-profit social welfare organization Prop Station, an organization which uses information technology (IT) to help disabled people achieve more autonomy and participate more actively in society, encouraging disabled people to find work and helping to create work opportunities for them. Both Ms. Takenaka and Mr. Nagumo believe that we have a responsibility to help other people maximize their potential; in this dialogue, they discuss how people can be helped to make the most of their potential, both in business enterprises and in society as a whole.

Opportunities for turning the impossible into the possible

Ms. Takenaka: Our activities involve unleashing the potential of people with severe disabilities who might have been thought incapable of working, using IT to enable them to work at home, from their beds. While this is a social initiative, we have had a lot of interest from people in the business world and in government. The extent to which businesspeople understand our activities is very important for us, and it is wonderful when an influential person like Yokohama Rubber Chairman Mr. Nagumo takes an interest in what we are doing.

Mr. Nagumo: It just so happens that currently Prime Minister Abe is promoting the "Plan for Promoting the Dynamic Engagement of All Citizens," which is aimed at creating a society in which people who in the past have not been able to work will be able to work and play an active role.

Ms. Takenaka: The approach taken to promoting work for the disabled will be the litmus test as to whether Japan really can become a society characterized by the "Dynamic Engagement of All Citizens."

Mr. Nagumo: When I first talked to you, Ms. Takenaka, I was amazed to hear that your initiative only came into being because of computers.

Ms. Takenaka: When we started out 25 years ago, it was just around the time when computers were starting to come into widespread use.

Mr. Nagumo: So this was around the time when Japan's "Bubble Economy" had just burst?

Ms. Takenaka: Yes, that's right. The Japanese economy was just bottoming out, and the people we were caring for made the suggestion to us themselves that this was the right time to be learning new skills, so that everyone would be able to use computers effectively. They pointed out that "if we are linked up by computer, we can work even from our beds." Over the last 25 years, we have continued to keep pace with the developments in information and communications technology. As a result, thankfully, we have never had any complaints about the quality of the work done by the disabled people that we help.

Mr. Nagumo: While people tend to feel sorry for the disabled, and feel that they need help, there are actually many disabled people who are very capable, and for some people being disabled actually seems to be a source of creativity.

Ms. Takenaka: When people have no choice, they take action. When I heard them saying "If we had computers, we could work; we want to give it a try", I felt certain that, if we could create an environment in which they could use computers, it would produce spectacular results.

Mr. Nagumo: I should think it is fair to say that, on the whole, business enterprises still don't really understand how much disabled people are capable of.

Ms. Takenaka: No, they don't understand. The thing is, people don't usually think of someone who is bedridden as being able to work. What is more, because bedridden disabled people are not potential candidates for recruitment to meet a government-set disabled employee quota, they are completely off the radar for business enterprises. While you could say that it's only natural that businesses don't understand, I think it is also partly that we ourselves haven't been making a big enough effort to educate them about it. Having said that, with the government's new initiative aimed at the "Dynamic Engagement of All Citizens," I feel that the opportunities to spread awareness among business enterprises have increased.

Mr. Nagumo: I suppose it relates to the fact that, even if a firm outsources work to disabled people through Prop Station, it doesn't count towards filling the government-set disabled employee quota for that firm. If the government changed the system, then awareness among business enterprises would probably increase.

Ms. Takenaka: The calculation of the official disabled person employment rate is based solely on formal recruitment as a regular employee. For people who are bedridden, and people who require help from a carer to go to the toilet, securing regular employment of that kind is very difficult. So why can't they work in other ways? Business enterprises would be able to meet the government-set disabled employee targets, and disabled people would become economically independent, develop a new sense of purpose, and possibly even become taxpayers; everyone would benefit. It's up to the politicians to make the necessary decisions, of course; rather than it just being us promoting the idea, it would carry much more weight if business enterprises would make their voices heard in support as well.

**"Helping people to maximize their potential."
This is important not just for business enterprises,
but for society as a whole.**

Ms. Takenaka: When I first met you, Mr. Nagumo, the thing that brought home to me that we were on the same wavelength was that the activities that we are implementing, and the way that Yokohama Rubber tries to ensure that every one of its employees is able to maximize his or her potential, are basically very similar in their essential features. It is a shame to allow people's potential to lie dormant. I remember you saying that this is important for society as a whole, as well. I believe that this attitude is the secret to Yokohama Rubber's successful development as a company.

Mr. Nagumo: I think that not just the disabled, but other people as well, often fail to develop 100% of their full potential. It is our responsibility as managers to think about how we can get people to realize their full potential. The same is true for society as a whole; it is vitally important that we become a society where everyone can develop all of their latent capabilities. The key factor is how you go about enhancing the sense of self-realization, job satisfaction, or motivation. It is very important for people to be able to feel that they are valued within their particular group or organization. The converse of that is we need to develop groups and organizations in which that sense of belonging is possible.



Ms. Takenaka: Work involves more than just earning money; it also helps to determine the extent to which a person feels needed. If someone feels that they are needed, they will respond by demonstrating an amazing level of energy and vigor. That is true right across the board, in big organizations as well as in small organizations.

**Working to build companies, and a society,
in which people of all different kinds are accepted**



Mr. Nagumo: When disabled people are working at home, this can be a source of pride for a company's employees, and it can also stimulate them to make even greater efforts in their own work.

Ms. Takenaka: I think that it provides an opportunity for employees to think about their work-styles, and also that it can lead to change within a company. This is not something that only applies to the disabled; it also applies to the ways in which women are able to work, and of course with the impact of globalization it is also becoming increasingly common to work alongside people of different nationalities and people with different religious beliefs.

Mr. Nagumo: People with different characteristics need to be working together in an atmosphere of mutual respect. I hope that Yokohama Rubber can be this kind of company. If a company is unable to achieve this, then it will be unable to attract and retain diversified human talent. As you pointed out just now, this issue does not only affect the disabled; unless individual company employees become more willing to take on different challenges, then 20 or 30 years down the road they will find that they have failed to realize their own ambitions in terms of the person they wanted to become. I hope that in the future I can get you to come and give a talk at our company, as an opportunity to make our employees more aware of this issue.

Ms. Takenaka: I am delighted to have had this opportunity to talk to you, and it would be wonderful if it helped to boost the motivation of your company's employees. I believe I am right in saying that your company will celebrate its 100th anniversary next year. This is a company with a rich history. It would be marvelous if, 20 or 30 years from now, all of Yokohama Rubber's employees, including the shop-floor workers, felt that this dialogue today had been the starting point for changes that had benefited the company over the intervening period.

Mr. Nagumo: Looking ahead to our next 100 years, I hope that we will be able to make changes that seem impossible now, and that by working together with one another we can create a better company, and a better society.

Profile of Ms. Nami Takenaka

Having an eldest daughter who was severely disabled led Ms. Takenaka to undertake self-directed study in the fields of pediatric medicine, social welfare and education. In 1991 she founded the grassroots organization Prop Station. In 1998 the Ministry of Health and Welfare granted Prop Station Social Welfare Corporation status, and Ms. Takenaka took on the post of Chairperson. Prop Station is focused on helping the disabled to develop their full potential, to achieve increased independence, and to participate more actively in society; it provides support to help disabled people secure work.