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Reaching out to Japan: Interview with Noriko Chapman by

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Article published on December 29th 2011 | Self Help

In most cases, individuals are not hurt by giving to others. For Noriko Chapman, it has created an international collaboration between a local U.S. nonprofit organization and a global leader in the automobile industry which led to the empowerment and economic independence of disabled workers. Chapman, who is a DENSO production manager, had worked with the Tennessee Rehabilitation Center (TRC) in Maryville to help increase its operations efficiency as part of her MBA project. In 2009, the Maryville TRC was ranked at eighth in contract sales in Tennessee. Its mission is to provide services that help lead individuals who have a physical and/or mental disability to employment and are designed to meet individual needs.

However, Chapmanâ€™s goodwill had many unintended consequences. S-he has had four versions of her first book published in one year, which is impressive for a beginning writer. She pledged 30 percent of the book proceeds to this organization. Chapman also helped to restore $75K of government funding to the Center. Chapman became connected to this organization. She observed, â€œI was inspired by the staff and by individuals with disabilities who were trying very hard to learn work skills and seek permanent employment.â€• Through her first book, she was able to bring more attention by the media and the public in general to this disability cause. In fact, it landed the TRCâ€™s director an expense-paid visit to DENSO in Japan.

DENSO Corporation, headquartered in Kariya, Aichi prefecture, Japan, is a leading global automotive supplier with customers that include all the world's major carmakers. With more than 200 subsidiaries and affiliates in 35 countries and regions (including Japan), DENSO had worked to assist the nonprofit organization with a contract that allowed disabled workers to earn income. In reality, DENSO was offering these workers a second chance. Chapman had made this relationship possible.

Therefore, Chapman has become a role model to millions of women looking to overcome extreme obstacles in life. She has been noted and quoted in such media outlets as Knoxville News Sentinel, Black Pearls Magazine, Whatâ€™s Going On? Talk show, and The Daily Times. The Knoxville Examiner sat down and talked with Chapman during the preparation of her upcoming book tour in Japan.

It appears you are becoming a role model to many women who do not have these opportunities and freedoms across the globe. What can you tell us about the Japanese culture as it relates to women in power?

Japan is a male-dominated society. Japanese women have more responsibilities at home to raise children, manage household chores and finance and support their husbands who work long hours and usually are breadwinners. Even though the culture is gradually adapting to accommodate the female workforce, career advancement for women in Japan is still limited. The changes are not quick enough to satisfy thousands of bright, hard-working Japanese women. Hopefully Japanese companies recognize the positive characteristics of women who can pay more attention to details or can multitask, and they are learning to utilize these strengths.

In addition, I believe we can find a variety of avenues to enjoy our lives. I was born as the oldest child in my family who has owned a small company for 101 years. Due to the fact of being a female, I was not given the opportunity to take over the business. Even though it was a disappointing cultural practice, I had the freedom to choose my career and chase my own dreams. I moved to the US 24 years ago and never regret it. This country gives me so many more chances than I could

have imagined. Iâ€™m so glad now that I am not male!

Who are the individuals who influenced you when you were growing up in Japan?

My hero is always my 99-year-old grandmother who lives in Japan. She has taught me to treat people with respect, to be strong and courageous and to be able to say â€œNoâ€• when we have to. She is also a business person whose motto is â€œcustomer and quality first.â€• She lost her husband and brother in the Philippines during WW2. During and after the war, she ran a family business while raising my father and uncle. She established a group and became a chairperson to help widows and women in the community. She never remarried but has devoted all her life to her family, business, employees, widows and single mothers in the community.

Discuss your planned international book tour to Japan. Why did you decide to do this?

My Japanese colleagues in Japan learned about the book Second Chance, about the Tennessee Rehabilitation Maryville Center with which Denso Manufacturing Tennessee has maintained a good business relationship for years. Some of my colleagues and friends preferred to read my book in Japanese. My family and friends also encouraged me to translate it into Japanese. Some may be interested in my personal stories about surviving cancer. The book cover is a Japanese painting by a lady who has been fighting against cancer. I truly honor her courage and strength. I am blessed to receive the invitation from Japan to introduce the book.

What activities do you have planned on your book tour?

A speaking engagement with Japanese ladies to discuss not only the book but also my career in the US and womenâ€™s career-related issues. to compare and contrast the cultural differences in Japan and US.

What do you hope to gain with this new book in Japanese?

I hope for people to receive the message that small acts can help our community in many different ways and by different talents.

The first book was done in conjunction with Lincoln Memorial Universityâ€™s professor Dr. Daryl Green. In your Japanese book, you collaborated with Reiko Farr. Please discuss how this came to reality.

Reiko is my friend and co-worker. She is a very polite, caring, faithful, hard-working mother. I approached her with the translation proposal because she knew my personality and the time when I was going through cancer in 2009. Our friendship became stronger through collaborating on the Japanese translation.

How has your company supported your efforts to work with nonprofit organizations?

My employer, DENSO, has supported me to obtain higher education, prepared me with technical experience and materials to support the LMU MBA project Real World Application, and provided adequate contract work to the center. Iâ€™m grateful to have the employer who even provided the opportunity to benchmark a manufacturing facility in Japan for the disabled.

Since you have come into the public view, you have been an advocate for nonprofit organizations such as the Center. What are your plans for the future?

I really enjoy the expanding opportunities to be able to interact with people from different backgrounds. Iâ€™d love to talk with them, listen to them, write about it, and maybe find common goals in order to make positive changes in our society.

Where can people get a copy of your book and how do we reach you?

The books are now available at bookstores or online distributors such as Amazon.com. I also can be reached through social media such as Facebook.

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About Dr. Daryl Green:
Dr. Daryl Green, who is a reporter for the Knoxville Examiner, has over 20 years of management experience. He has been noted and quoted by USA Today, Ebony Magazine, and Associated Press. For more information, you can go to a nuleadership.wordpress.com or a www.darylgreen.org.

Article Keywords:
future leader, emerging leadership, MBA Programs, MBA resources

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