

Part 2: The Expansion Phase

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Building a Recruitment Business from Zero

While he was starting up several other businesses, Tadayoshi now also set to work on developing a recruitment business; however, he first operated this business essentially as a sideline. Hoping he might somehow be able to expand this domain, he made the decision to bring in a talented manager.

The person he hired was a Japanese woman named Hiromi Onishi.

Hiromi, the New Manager, Gets to Work

Although Tazaki Group had started its recruitment business in 1975, it was little more than a sideline in which candidates were introduced from a small pool of registered jobseekers whenever requests were received from Japanese companies stationed in the UK that were struggling with staff shortages. However, the staffing needs of Japanese companies were far from small. It seemed to Tadayoshi that this was a business that could grow a great deal if it was run the right way. It was with these thoughts in mind that he made the decision to hire a person in charge of the business. His prediction was spot-on: welcoming a new manager in 1981 and proactively expanding operations led to the recruitment business surging forwards. The person who instigated this leap forwards, and who later became both Tadayoshi's wife and the Co-Founder, Executive Director, Chairman and CEO of JAC Group, was none other than Hiromi Tazaki (nee Onishi).

Yet at this time, Hiromi did not really have professional credentials in this area. Not only that, but she had never worked in management—indeed, she had never even heard of the term “recruitment” in the sense of the “recruitment business”. She was a true beginner in this area. Nevertheless,

when Tazaki Group was searching for a manager, somebody introduced Hiromi, saying “I know someone good; do you want to meet with them?” Perhaps this introduction was connected with the warm praise that Hiromi had earned from those around her for the extraordinary zeal with which she had carried out her job at the London branch of Sumitomo Mitsui Trust Bank. After an interview, it was decided that Hiromi would join the company. From Hiromi's perspective, the company president at the time, who conducted her interview, appeared to lack a definitive plan for the business, even when Hiromi asked questions. Even by the end of the interview, she still lacked a clear picture of what kind of job this would be. The only impression she could form was “It's an entirely new kind of work, and I think I'll find it motivating”. Up to this point, she had carried out what was basically routine work at a bank (general affairs and accounting); in this new job, however, she would have the opportunity to really grow a business based on her own judgments and actions. Attracted by these possibilities, she decided to make the leap into a line of work she knew little about.

The company had set up an office for this recruitment business on the second

floor of a supermarket managed by Tazaki, yet it was essentially an office in name only. The setup consisted of little more than a single desk-and-chair set and a telephone placed in a corner of the supermarket's accounting office. What's more, Hiromi's predecessor quit the company unexpectedly at about the same time as Hiromi joined. With no real handover process for the job, all that was left on the desk for Hiromi was a ledger listing the names of 10 candidates and the contact details for a number of Japanese firms. It did not seem likely that she would be able to take the business forwards by herself in circumstances like these, where she would be essentially starting from scratch. Oddly enough, however, these difficult circumstances only made Hiromi more determined to rise to the challenge. She was fascinated by the idea of delivering results through her own actions by thinking for herself, rather than being told what to do by somebody else. She could see that the first thing she had to do was to build as many connections as possible with Japanese companies that wanted human resources.



Hiromi Tazaki, advancing the recruitment business



Hiromi with members of the accounting team on the second floor of the supermarket in Finchley Central (North London)

“Don’t Overthink, Just Do It!”: Forming Connections

Hiromi's first act was to purchase a map of London. She then started taking the train into the City of London (central London) each day, where she would walk about while consulting her map and call on any Japanese firms located there without any prior appointments. Most people would expect that they would just get sent away if they turned up out of the blue like this. It is hard to imagine doing this kind of cold-calling these days. But in the UK at the time, the idea of a salesperson—let alone a young Japanese woman—calling on companies like this was highly unusual in itself, and very few Japanese workers stationed in these workplaces would have felt able to refuse a meeting. Once she'd managed to meet the person in charge, they would usually agree that the company needed a Japanese assistant hired locally, no matter what kind of company it was.

At this time, agents introducing Japanese people were seldom found, so a lot of companies were very interested in what Hiromi said. Having so few contact points with Japanese people living in the UK, it did not take long before Japanese companies asked Hiromi “Can you introduce us to Japanese people who can work here?” Hiromi added the companies to her list of registered companies free of charge and started setting up interviews. In this system, fees would only be incurred if both parties liked each other and signed

a contract. By explaining this setup carefully to candidates and companies face-to-face, Hiromi won their trust. Needless to say, in addition to visiting companies, she was also proactive in selling her company's services over the telephone. Hiromi prepared a list of Chambers of Commerce members, steadily phoned through the entire list of companies whose names were there, and managed to schedule meetings.

At this time, many Japanese finance companies were expanding their operations into London, which is a major financial centre. With many Japanese financial institutions also setting up local subsidiaries in London, the number of Japanese companies in London dealing with finance shot up within a short space of time. As a result, Hiromi's business inevitably found many opportunities to introduce human resources to finance companies; another major plus for Hiromi was the fact that she had experience of working in Sumitomo Mitsui Trust Bank and understood the kind of people that finance companies were looking for, enabling her to make detailed offers in this domain.

While she was forging connections with companies in this way, Hiromi was also working hard to secure job-seeking candidates. In those days, the usual way to attract applicants was to put up notices

on the noticeboard of the consulate. Hiromi, however, made all kinds of special efforts to bring in candidates. She tried to think of all possible methods for bringing together Japanese people, and put these into practice. She steadily gathered information, asking her acquaintances and anybody new she met whether they knew of any Japanese people who wanted to find a job. As neither computers nor photocopiers were in general use at the time, she would print out information using a mimeograph and stand by Bank tube station in the City of London between 8:00 and 9:30 (morning commuting hours) in the morning each day, asking “Are you Japanese?” to any women who appeared to be of East Asian descent and handing her the mimeographed information about vacant positions. She was determined never to let a single chance slip away. This was a game to be won through focus and belief in oneself. She was tenacious in her quest for possible ways to introduce candidates and companies to each other. If someone had stopped working to look after a young child, she would still put the feelers out, asking “Have you thought about looking for a job with shorter hours so you could combine it with having a young child?” To the company that was unable to recruit full-time permanent employees, she would suggest “Perhaps you could try hiring part-timers?”

Rapid Growth, Just as Expected

Thanks to all this hard work, sales rose rapidly in the early days of the business. Hiromi herself was not particularly surprised by this result. From the materials her predecessor had left behind, it was evident that the business had previously been run as little more than a sideline. Given that she was now tackling the work in earnest, it was only to be expected that sales would climb quickly. As a result of this success, she was able to achieve her long-cherished dream about six months after joining: relocating the business's premises from the supermarket second floor to an office in the City of London itself. This meant less travelling time when making visits to companies

each day. Enabling work to be carried out more efficiently proved to be a turning point for the operations, which transitioned from a sideline into a fully-fledged business. The numbers of customers on the books went from an initial 20 or so companies to around 100 companies. The business was at the point where it was dealing with nearly all the Japanese companies in the area, and had built up a strong network by introducing 10 or more candidates in a month to a single client. Hiromi was now thoroughly immersing herself in the business of recruitment. Even within a single industry such as the finance industry, the strategies of each company differed. Different companies

wanted different kinds of human resources depending on their strategies; the human resources thus introduced also differed in terms of their experiences. Hiromi would gauge what kind of human resources they wanted, for what reasons, and for what kind of workplaces, before putting together her proposals. These proposals resulted in people getting hired and fees being earned for the business. She felt sure that she was suited to this business, which requires a certain amount of talent for matching; she also felt confident that providing this kind of service for Japanese firms had promising future prospects and offered the possibility of business growth.



Making the recruitment business a pillar of the Group through Hiromi's hard work



At an exhibition of JAC Recruitment



The new office in the financial district of the City of London, which the business was relocated to. Dauntsey House also housed a lawyer's office and a consulting firm.