Consistently improving oneself

Toshio Ikeda

A trailblazing figure in Japan's computer market

Episode. 01

“Everything starts with inspiration”

During the post-war reconstruction period when Fujitsu was primarily a telecommunications equipment manufacturer, engineer Toshio Ikeda vowed to create a domestically produced computer. Through repeated trial and error and adhering to the motto “Everything begins with inspiration,” in 1954 he completed work on the FACOM100, a practical relay-type computer. What would normally have taken half a year to calculate by hand was accomplished in just three days, deeply impressing physicist Dr. Hideki Yukawa.

Ikeda’ s spirit of challenge did not end there. To eliminate calculation errors, he pursued the groundbreaking idea of having the computer itself check its own answers. Even when a fire destroyed the blueprints during the development of a new computer, he refused to give up, proclaiming, “It's all in my head.” In 1956, the FACOM128, the first relay-based commercial computer, was born. It played a significant role in the development of Japanese science and technology, contributing to the design of camera lenses and the first domestically produced passenger aircraft, the YS-11.

Despite being taunts such as, “IBM is a giant elephant, while Japanese manufacturers are ants,” this team continued to advance domestically produced computers and inspire others to challenge themselves. The FACOM M-190, unveiled in 1974, was praised as surpassing IBM in every aspect and contributed to significant progress in science and industry.

“The true meaning of life lies in constantly improving oneself.” Ikeda’ s passion not only drove Fujitsu forward but also opened new horizons for Japan's computer industry.

Lessons from Toshio Ikeda The importance of Taking on Challenges

Point 1:
Make the most of what you love

From an early age, Ikeda loved mathematics and enjoyed solving difficult problems. His personality would not allow him to rest until he had thoroughly explored an idea. This led to academic awards and even the discovery of a new proof for the Pythagorean theorem.

Point 2:
Leading the way with enthusiasm

Shortly after joining Fujitsu, Ikeda was involved in an incident that made him famous. Some Fujitsu telephones installed in Civil Communications Section (CCS) of General Headquarters (GHQ) of the Allied Powers failed to work properly. This caused a great deal of commotion within Fujitsu, prompting Ikeda to perform a theoretical analysis of the dial assembly. In the end, he solved the problem, creating a welcoming atmosphere that embraced Ikeda's unconventional approach.

Point 3:
There is no finish line

Fujitsu management requested to sell FACOM100 within the Company. Even though it was equipped with an error-checking function, sometimes malfunctions still slipped through the cracks. Ikeda was staunchly opposed to selling the faulty machines to customers, resulting in the FACOM100 being made unavailable for sale and having it reclassified from a “commercial” computer to a “utility” computer instead. From there, the error-checking function were improved, and two years later in 1956, Fujitsu's first commercial computer, the FACOM128A, was released.

Toshio Ikeda

A figure who strongly promoted the localized production of computers, greatly contributing to Japan's rapid development after World War II. Widely acclaimed as a computer genius, he has left his mark on the history of computers in Japan.