

Give it a try

Taiyu Kobayashi

Securing the top spot in the domestic computer market

Episode. 02

“The final push creates strength”

During Japan’s period of rapid economic growth, it was widely considered to be impossible for computers to process complex Japanese Kanji and Kana characters.. At Fujitsu, however, we believed in this dream and worked harder than anyone to make it come true. The person who eventually made it happen was Fujitsu’s eighth president, Taiyu Kobayashi.

The development of JEF—the world's first system that allowed Japanese speakers to freely manipulate kanji characters—had no precedent and presented a number of difficulties. Despite collaboration between engineers from various departments, the project proceeded with trial and error.

During this arduous task, the engineers recalled a phrase Kobayashi often repeated based on his own experiences: “Give it a try. That final push will be the strength that propels you one step ahead of others.” Kobayashi’s words inspired the engineers and reignited their spirit of challenge.

In 1979, JEF was finally released and Japanese became a fascinating addition to the computer landscape. That same fiscal-year, Fujitsu surpassed IBM Japan in computer sales, securing the top spot in the domestic market for the first time. The dream was brought to fruition thanks to Kobayashi’s unwavering belief in the potential of his team. “Give it a try.” Kobayashi’s words not only drove technology forward but also had the power to move people’s hearts.

Lessons from Taiyu Kobayashi

The essence of accepting challenges

Point 1: Trust your colleagues

In those days, Fujitsu had a daily wage system, and when Ikeda became engrossed in computer development, he would stay at home for days on end, forgetting to go to work. During this period, he received no monthly salary and no bonus. That’s what prompted Kobayashi to create a special exception to provide a fixed monthly salary for Ikeda alone. In this way, Kobayashi became a key figure within the company, creating an environment where Ikeda’s free-spirited talent could flourish.

Point 2: Take initiative

Kobayashi read the Radiation Laboratory Series from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and proposed computer development as one of the new themes Fujitsu should pursue in the future. He also took the initiative to work on the front lines of sales to pioneer the computer market.

Point 3: Persevering to the end

“People don’t come up with good ideas unless they are pushed to the limit. When you’re sitting comfortably at your desk in a comfortable environment, your creativity dulls. It’s only when you’re standing on the edge of a cliff, trying to figure out how to survive, that you can squeeze out good ideas. Therefore, even if you think, ‘This is impossible,’ you should still try your best. That final push is what gives you the strength to take one step further than others.”

Taiyu Kobayashi

Kobayashi was Ikeda’s supervisor when he joined the company, becoming the 8th president of Fujitsu in 1976. He led the success of the FACOM M series and the development of the Japanese Language Information System JEF, propelling Fujitsu to the top of domestic computer sales in 1980.

