

Mark & Mary Devlin Crisscross K.K

Essence of Diversity in the Song, “Imagine”

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Mark & Mary Devlin

Crisscross K.K. CEO Publisher and Co-founder

Biography*

Mark and his wife/partner, Mary, grew up in Scotland. Mark came to Japan in October 1989 and did several jobs. Mary left her job as a strategy consultant for Andersen Consulting to come to Japan in 1990. On arriving in Tokyo she worked for a large bank.

In September 1993 Mark and Mary started Crisscross to publish the Tokyo Classified in February 1994. Renamed as Metropolis in 2000, the magazine now is Japan's No 1 English free magazine.

In September 2000 Mark and Mary started Japan Today, which became the most popular news and information site about Japan in English. In May 2006 they launched Crisscross, a social networking site.

Mark and Mary were married in Hawaii in 1995. They have two children Aran (4) and Kara (2).

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|---------------------|---|
| Metropolis | http://www.metropolis.co.jp/ |
| Japan Today | http://www.japantoday.com/ |
| Crisscross | http://www.crisscross.com/ |
| The Crisscross News | http://blog.crisscross.com/ |
| Crisscross Creative | http://www.crisscrosscreative.jp/ |

**Quote from The Crisscross News <http://blog.crisscross.com/>*

***This interview was conducted in September 2006.*

I Arrival in Japan during Bubble Economy, First Edition of “Tokyo Classified”

-- You are a husband and wife team, and you have a magazine with a lot of nationalities working under you, just like a mini-United Nations. Thank you for taking the time to meet with us. We are trying to help the Japanese public to be more and more aware of what Diversity and Inclusion really mean, and how to work in a more global, international community. This is one of the reasons why we have been on this quest to find the essence from people like you, who are working already in such an environment.

First of all, could you please give us how you got started as K.K. Crisscross, including the history of the founding and development, overview of the operations and the scale, as well as the make up of your workforce. Personally I would like to know why you chose the name, Crisscross, which is so unusual. Also why you selected Japan?

Mark: Well, that is the first thing, of course. We both studied engineering in Scotland.

Mary: We met on our first day at university. Mark was 16 years old, and I was 17 years old. So we were very young.

-- Oh! Was this love at first sight?

Mary: No, we actually didn't like each other. It took a few months.

Mark: Yes, it took a few months, a few years, a few decades.

Mary: Mark and I have strong opinions, so of course, we argued a lot when we first met.

Mark: So we went to the university together, and at the end we had to sign up for careers. Mary had a very good job with Anderson Consulting and went to London. I really did not know what I wanted to do, so I thought I would take a leap and come to Japan for a year. Then, I could go back to London and say, “Oh, I've been to Japan”, and you know, that would have been advantageous as a skill.”

Mary: In those days that was very cool. Japan was at the top of the world.

-- What age were you, 20?

Mary: 22, maybe.

Mark: Japan was in the bubble. It was very attractive! In the UK media it was very exciting. It was always about Japan -- Japan was taking over. China has the same type of media attention now. So I

saved to come over. I worked as an English teacher, editor, and at a few other jobs. After a year, Mary came over to join me. She gave up her job.

Mary: I came first of all for a long vacation to see if I would like Japan, but as soon as I arrived here, I knew that I was going to really like it. On the first day, I felt, “Wow! This was great.” I went back to London, and after a month, I put in my notice. After a few months, I came over to join Mark. Luckily I was actually hired by the same company in Tokyo but on a project basis with Anderson Consulting. They were doing a big project for UBS Bank. I was working on that project, and UBS asked Anderson Consulting if I could join UBS.

So I went to UBS for a couple of years. By that time, Mark was working for Jardine Fleming Securities. So we were both in the finance industry. It was just after the bubble, so things were getting tougher. Then, I thought I was leaving UBS to join another big finance company, and in the end, it fell through. I had actually signed a contract, and after many months of keeping me hanging on, they said, “I’m sorry we are not employing you.” I thought my career was finished (finger points down). I actually found myself unemployed.

Mark: It’s definitely hard to be unemployed in Japan. It’s expensive, of course, and far away from support. I was still working at Jardine Fleming. One day I met a person in a bar. He said that he was starting a new magazine called “Tokyo Classified.” I thought it was an interesting project, so I volunteered for Mary to work for him.

Mary: He was working in the finance company in a very senior position. He had a good idea to start a classified ad magazine so that foreigners could contact each other. We thought that was a great idea. He was not going to work in the new business, but he wanted to put some investment and find someone who would set the business up and actually run it for him. So Mark volunteered me.

Mark: But it so happened that we all met a few weeks later and we started to decide that it was a good idea to do the project together. In fact, he chose the name, Crisscross. He did not put any deep thought, but he went to Hong Kong and just bought a company named Crisscross by looking down a list. There was no meaning to the name. However, the problem for us at that time was there was a group, a rap song by two young teen-aged rappers, and the band was called Crisscross and the song was called, “Crisscross that will make you want to jump!”

Mary: When our partner came back from Hong Kong and told us he bought a company, Crisscross, we said, “Oh, no! Because we could only think about the song; every time we mention the company name, people are going to say, “Jump, jump.”

Mark: We did not like it so much, and we did not use the name for years.

Mary: But strangely enough over the years we realized that, because our business puts people in contact with each other, the name, Crisscross, was actually a perfect name and was meant to be.

Mark: In 1993 autumn we started working to plan the business, and by 1994 February we published our first edition of Tokyo Classified, which I could actually show. This is it!

-- I remember when it came out. Wasn't it smaller?

Mary: No, it was always this size.

Mark: So this is the first issue. Simply 4 pages with color, red. The content was all classified ads. Basically it was for buying or selling any type of item. Announcements or finding a place to live, finding friends and partners, finding jobs, and so on. You can see that this was what we said. "Hello from Tokyo Classified. This magazine is for you. It's about time you had a poet to broadcast your message to the world. Want to sell, buy, meet, have a party, you can do it here." Basically the idea was from the very beginning the magazine belonged to the people, and the people made the magazine. Just apart from this message here, they added their own content. Up until then, people like Mary and I had come to Japan, and at that time there was no Internet, no Satellite TV...

Mary: Even magazines were very expensive. They were very high priced. We were cut off from our home countries. International telephone calls were very expensive. So if I phoned home to my parents, I would talk for less than 5 minutes. It was 350 yen a minute or 400 yen a minute.

Mark: We were really isolated. We came with the idea that Japan was a bubble economy; it was wonderful, full of flashing lights, interesting culture, but when we went out here, the actual support system in the community was very weak. This magazine was basically to help people to survive at the beginning.

Mary: I think perhaps for expats, who were coming over, they had their companies looking after them and certain systems were in place. They could join the American Club, but for other people who were not at that level, then, it was quite difficult to get into contact with other people or to know what was going on. That was the aim of the Tokyo Classified at that time.

Mark: I think I would like to expand that a little bit. In the 90's there were high level expats and there were some travelers, who stayed to become English teachers. But what happened after the

Bubble was that many new “middle class” foreigners came to Japan. People like Mary and I came. We found that we could live here and do things. The middle class group grew, and the others became smaller. The magazine’s growth represents the growth of that community of people, who came in the early 90’s and 80’s. They had to survive and buy things themselves. They needed basic information but then, as time went on, they wanted to do more things, find out more about the city, about Japan, and find more entertainment. So that’s why the magazine grew, compared with the Weekender, which stayed with the shrinking number of high-level expats.

-- I know after the bubble burst a lot of the foreign subsidiaries were not sending very expensive expats, especially with children because of the expensive schooling at international schools and all the costs.

Mark: But at the same time, many people who came, were younger people like ourselves. They were attracted to Japan. After a few years they found it quite good. Some of them found Japanese girl friends, wives or businesses that kept them here. They were growing up and getting better jobs. They had children and were becoming more integrated into the society.

II Process of Learning and Growth

-- *From the Tokyo Classified, then you started to expand into another magazine?*

Mary: In those days, as Mark said, our company structure was more like a branch in Japan. A few years later the Internet was coming. We wanted to be at the forefront. We knew it was going to be very important for the international community with the communications to the rest of the world and for getting in contact with each other. We were one of the first Internet provider company. We had at one time about 10,000 subscribers, and at that time we changed our company to a Japanese Kabushiki Kaisha. We established a K.K. because we knew that we wanted to be seen more solid in our business in Japan. For example, when we were dealing with Japanese banks and large companies, they would consider you as just a foreign company.

-- *So this was in which year?*

Mary: In 1995. We just completed 10 years of our Kabushi Kaisha.

Mark: So let me show you something, the progression of things. Actually it was only 4 pages.

-- *Now you have quite a few pages...*

Mark: Later there were 12 pages.

Mary: Sounds very slow. After a year...

Mark: But you can see now that we have real advertisers. We have more staff.

-- *That is unusual to have photos of staff.*

Mary: We did that for a long time, so that people would have affinity with us, and to have a feeling that we were not remote. We felt very strongly in those days that we did not want to be a one-way media, just broadcasting. We wanted to be seen as receiving. That was our first message, "The content is coming from you. Please tell us what you want." It was very much a two-way communication.

Mark: We added colors. We put small features. This issue has about immigration policy, an important subject for our readers. This issue has 16 pages.

-- *Two years later...*

Mary: We were very patient. We started the company without any capital or knowledge. We had no experience of media or running a company. To be honest in the beginning, we had no idea what we were doing. All along the way it has been very much a learning process, how to run a company, how to hire staff and work with the staff, how to make a magazine, how to find advertisers, and how to do all of that. Everything was a learning process right from the beginning. So in some ways, it might seem slow but for us that was the best way, because it was evolutionary, a step-by-step learning process.

-- Currently your company is a Kabushiki Kaisha so that means you have some capital.

Mary: Yes, over the years. By the year 2000, I think the market was good in Japan, and we had expanded a lot. The magazine had expanded, we had our Internet provider business, and we were doing more publishing on the Internet. We were broadening our scope gradually.

-- Currently your number of staff including yourselves is about 30-40. What is the ideal size of your company in the near future? What is the target you wish to achieve? ... mid term and long term.

Mary: Obviously we are always looking to increase our business.

--To the different fields or...?

Mary: We always look for new business opportunities. Recently we started a creative agency. Last year we had 2, and now we have grown up to 5 people.

-- You mean consulting?

Mary: No, it's creative. We make brochures for companies. We do designing, printing, websites... We work with the United Nations University, and we work with big ad agencies for NEC, and with a lot of different agencies.

Mark: We have many clients who want to do things. Japanese clients want to make things in English, and English clients want to make things in Japanese. We are a gateway. We want to see how it will evolve.

Mary: We would like to be hiring more people. Probably over the next year, we would expect to hire 10 people. If business goes well, we would hire a lot more. We are very evolutionary and take a step at a time.

III Competitive Advantage in Business through Diversity

-- *Let's discuss Diversity. Knowing the make up of your workforce would be helpful.*

Mark: We have about 40 to 50 people in the office from about 10 countries. Just looking out, I can see people from Japan, United States, Germany, Sweden, England, India, the Philippines. What else? Brazil...

-- *How about China or Korea?*

Mary: Not at the moment. We had one staff from China, but some of our staff had left for China. Australia and many countries. We had people before from Canada, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, everywhere in the world.

-- *Having this very diverse, mixed workforce, do you definitely consider this a very competitive advantage for your business?*

Mary: Yes, yes. Especially in our business, we are serving an international community. So the people who work here should be international. Even with our Japanese staff, maybe half of our staff is Japanese; they have worked somewhere internationally and have grown up in another country. They have international experiences, too.

Mark: Of course, the company language is English, so everyone has to speak English in the office. That's one thing that brings everyone together, the common language.

Mary: Most of the staff speaks Japanese also.

-- *Really! Even the foreigners?*

Mary: Yes, most of the staff.

-- *Some of them got married with Japanese?*

Mark: Some have studied at the university.

Mary: They have Japanese wives and husbands. Or they studied at the university. They have children. It's a very diverse group of people.

-- *In Japan we are thought of being very homogeneous, but having this kind of diverse background,*

how do you get all of them integrated, working towards the goals of the company?

Mark: People come together because of the magazine. They have a specific goal, which is to create this magazine that gives the information to the community. People are focused mainly on that.

Mary: It is not just the magazine but we are publishing too. I know we are going to talk later about our mission statement. We are publishing in English about Japan. We have the Internet news business, as well. People believe in what we are doing, and the products from the business we are doing. People come around that.

Mark: They come around that, which serves the wider community, which is the international community. People are interested in the foreigners in Japan, interacting with them. The magazine is like a mini-reaction of that. The magazine represents the diversity of the community. This company represents the diversity of the community.

Mary: Many people before they come to have an interview for a job, they already know who we are and what we do. The reason they come for an interview is because they say, "I love your magazine; I use the website all the time. I was in the States and found out about Japan from your website." They don't join just because of Mark and Mary. They like the business that we are doing.

-- So you are hiring very qualified people who have had publishing, editorial, or journalistic background?

Mark: Not at this stage. Generally not. We tend to hire people who are interested in what we are doing. People who have good energy and fit into this group, which means they are very nice people, and they are clever.

Mary: We hire smart people.

-- Are there many people who want to work for your company? How do you try to attract these qualified people?

Mark: We advertise in our own magazine but we also advertise in other places, as well.

Mary: We usually use other English media, and we would use Japanese media, so we can get a wide range of people. From there we would choose the person who we thought is most qualified for the job. Most qualified does not always depends on the previous experience. Of course, it is great if we find a great person, who has been working in this kind of industry and who knows the work. That's

great. Often people might have done something completely different from the past. We go very strongly on the personality, and what type of person or character, because we believe if the person is very motivated and they have the communication skills, they will do something. Then, that is sometimes more important than they had worked in a company before doing this kind of job.

-- Japanese companies have a special salary level depending on experience and time of service, etc. But your company is supposed to be very diverse, so your salary level is also very diverse?

Mark: In our company it is based on performance, not on age. In Japan if you are 35 or 45 you have a certain salary level. We wouldn't do that. We work by merit and if the person is doing well...

Mary: ...on the job. For this kind of job, we would expect to pay within this range. Now the person who comes into that job; for example, say we were going to hire someone as the head of general administration, that person may have experience for 20 years or something else. We are not going to pay a huge salary because of that. We are going to pay depending on the job. Even though the person had done something different before, if we thought he could be really good at the job, then, we might offer him that job with that kind of salary.

Mark: Yeah, we have to be very flexible in the arrangements. You might find someone, for example, an older person in the late 60's, who may be retired. That person still is able to do really good work. Some may have been discarded by Japanese companies, but we say, "They are very valuable to us."

Mary: Especially people more in the 50's or 60's. In Japan it happens a lot. I hear that a person who is older than 45 years or more, a Japanese company won't even interview that person. We can take advantage of that.

-- Women after a certain age range especially have very hard time finding a job.

Mark: It is a shame, because people have so much talent. In our company we are really interested in the talent, not on what society thinks of the talent.

Mary: Nor on any other issue. We think, "Can this person do the job?" Age or sex, religion or nationality, or anything...

-- Is not considered relevant. As long as that person can perform according to the goals you set forward.

IV Vision of Being the Gateway between Japan and the World

-- In terms of that goal, your mission and vision statement, I would like to know...

Mark: Mary and I were discussing this before the meeting; we don't have a formal mission statement.

Mary: I think the message that is communicated to the rest of the staff in the company would be that we have always aimed to be a kind of gateway to Japan.

-- A gateway...?

Mary: So we would like for people in the international community or Japanese in Japan to be able to understand more about the international people and what is going on better. We say gateway because it is both ways. We want people outside of Japan to be able to understand Japan better or have a better idea of what is really going on, and international people in Japan to have a better access within Japan. Our magazine, of course, is very much inside of Japan, serving the international community, but our website which is Japan Today, is the No. 1 English website about Japan in the world. 80% of our readership is outside Japan.

--Not so much then in Japan?

Mary: Only 20% in Japan. We have so many people reading, we have over 2 and 1/2 million page views per month.

Mark: Over a quarter of a million people read Japan Today each month.

-- Is this by subscription?

Mary: No. It's free. Our business model has always been to provide free media in order to have higher readership. Because we have a higher number of readers; therefore, we can sell advertising. Find ways for companies to pay rather than the consumers.

-- This is very beneficial for the consumers!

Mary: Yes, it is! Also in Japan when we started, Weekender was around which was free, but it is an unusual model in Japan. In those days they did not have many free magazines and papers. Now if I go to Omotesando, there are many.

-- *Hot Pepper...*

Mary: That's very recent. Only in the last 4-5 years. Before then, Japan did not seem to use that model.

-- *That means your business is getting very competitive year by year?*

Mark: Not so much in the English-language market.

Mary: Most of the papers are in Japanese. One company tried to do an English magazine, but it seemed to disappear quite quickly.

Mark: Back to the mission and vision, basically with our magazine, our first stage was to create this type of gateway. News site was the second stage. Our objective, I suppose, was to add the understanding of Japan. We were an unusual situation because we were actually in Japan as foreign residents. We can see what is going on in Japan. People outside of Japan had no idea of Japan. They had stereotyped images. We tried to breakdown these stereotypes.

-- *Oh, great!*

Mark: I will give you an example. On Japan Today, we have a section in here called Pop Vox, [<http://www.japantoday.com/jp/popvox>] where we go out and ask Japanese people on the streets a question about the news of the day. For example in this week's case, we ask, "Five years later after the 9.11 terror attacks, is the world safer?" (Showing website) You can see here we have just ordinary Japanese people. Their opinions are sometimes strange and sometimes normal, but again it is a mix and very ordinary. As time goes on, people begin to see that Japanese people are not one thing, but wider and have opinions. For example, when I first came to Japan, it was common for foreigners to say that Japanese people had no opinions!

--*(Laughter) That's true. In those days...*

Mark: Now because we have this type of section readers, people outside Japan can see that Japanese are a diverse group of people. There's a young guy like this one in any other country. They are real people.

Mary: Some say Japanese are not creative. This is a stereotype. These images are absolutely nonsense.

Mark: Like orientalism...

-- *Geisha, Mt. Fuji, images that older expats have.*

Mary: In those days, people saw Japan only as industrial and as companies. Now for young people today they see Japan as manga, anime (animation), and all of those cultural things, so very much has changed. That is very good.

Mark: So we try to show that diversity; we are trying to break open and making world's impression on Japan more diverse.

-- *So you are able to do this with your mission and vision to show that Japan is very diverse. Our question is, "Is there a way where you can show the Japanese who seem to be totally unaware of Diversity, to be more aware of what is diverse.*

Mary: We have with our magazine, Metropolis [<http://www.metropolis.co.jp/>]. Of the female readers, about 50% are Japanese ladies. We think that is because these ladies like to find out what foreigners are doing or what the international community is thinking or what is going on. With the male readers, it is less than that, about 15%. There are a lot of people in Japan obviously, who are interested in finding out what is going on and what do other groups of people think.

Mark: One of the problems with that is Japan is always absorbing information. I think to some extent they like to absorb. It is not very good at putting out.

-- *Also they are not good with publicizing.*

Mark: We are doing that role. We are saying that Japan is not stereotypical. It's wider and diverse.

Mary: I think there has been a fear. Now the mayor in Tokyo is really trying to promote tourism and bring more foreign people over to Japan. That's good. The image of Japan before was seen as very scary. They were so many things about etiquette. What happens if I do the wrong thing? Japanese people are so polite. If I did the wrong thing, it will be unforgivable. Of course, this is completely untrue. When they come to Japan, people are actually relaxed and not as uptight as I was led to believe. If you do anything wrong, they would laugh like anyone else.

Mark: Trying to expand people's understanding of Japan has been one of our main goals through the Internet on **Japan Today**. The most important point of **Japan Today** is that under each story, we have a space where readers can discuss the news story. When people are discussing a story, for example, "Koizumi criticizes China. Abe says Japan left scars in WWII." Then, we look at that story, and here are the people who are discussing that story. This site is the biggest place in the world for discussions on Japanese and US issues. When we first started, there was no place to discuss.

-- *So people write in...?*

Mary: If you type your message, it will go up on the site.

--*It is like a blog?*

Mark: We were doing this before blogs became popular.

Mary: People who join in these discussions can be any kind of people. It can be a Japanese, or someone sitting over in America; it can be someone sitting in Pakistan or someone sitting in Africa, wherever.

-- *So it is really Crisscross. Amazing!*

Mary: Yes. People all over the world are joining in the discussions and talking about Japanese issues.

Mark: For example, there is an issue about Japan's whaling policy. There are two sides of the story, but if you read the Western media it may seem like there only one side: Japan does whaling but rest of the world does not like it. Because we have people discussing the issues, the discussions become subtler, and less black and white. Some people are one side, and others on the other side. Some people change their minds. There is a real discussion going on.

Mary: I think more people find the middle ground.

Mark: That is one of the important parts with this project. We make people Crisscross in locations but also in their mental states.

-- *There is a transformation and a kind of an evolution, a better understanding of what is really happening in Japan...*

Mary: Usually our news story is very often short. But under the news story, the information you can get through the discussions is 10 times more. They bring in more facts and opinions.

--*Now you are very happy to have your company name, CrissCross.*

Mary: Perfect name. (Laughter)

V Hiring Policy

--*Within your company is it 50:50 men and women?*

Mary: Yes, pretty much.

-- *Do you have any hiring practice that you prefer, because in Japanese companies obviously women are not hired as many as men, so certain companies which are promoting diversity give special value by making sure more women are hired.*

Mark: We don't do that.

Mary: In fact, we don't believe in that kind of thing, to be honest. We think that is another kind of prejudice or discrimination. We always believe in the best person for the job. It happens to be that 10 men come through, and they are the best people. 10 women come through. Whatever. Then, hire the best people.

--*That's great.*

Mary: Very strongly in the company, we don't believe in any kind of prejudice. We don't like it. We actively would work against it. We wouldn't like anyone to be in the company with prejudices. So whether it has to do with nationality, gender, age, religion...

--*How about the disabled?*

Mary: We have never employed anyone, who has been disabled, because no one has come for an interview. If someone actually disabled comes to us, we will again look at the person and if he is capable of doing the job. It will not be an issue.

Mark: If the person is capable of doing the job, and you have to make some adjustments to the working environment, we would be happy to do that. If the person is in a wheelchair, we may need to make a special ramp. We will do that. Basically we want to find the spark in that person, and a connection between you and him, and the company has to accommodate that.

-- *What is the average age of your workforce?*

--*Who is the oldest?*

Mary: We had an elderly gentleman who worked for us. Well, he wasn't so truthful about his age really! He was great and a very good friend to us. He told us he was 69, but when he died we found out that he was actually 74. I can only imagine that he lied about his age, because he thought that if he told the truth, that we would tell him that he could not work or other people would think differently about him.

Mark: It would not matter to us, of course.

Mary: He was fitter than me. The oldest person in the company now is about 55...

--Do you have an employment agreement every year to renew?

Mary: Actually in our employment agreement we have one-year employment agreement, and automatically it will be renewed unless they give notice or we give notice. As far as we are concerned, someone can keep working as long as they are fit to keep working.

-- So what is the average, would you say?

Mary: Probably younger than us, about 35 or so. When we started the company, we were about 26; in those days it was usually younger people who wanted to work for us.

Mark: There was an older guy in the 50's. Actually we want more experienced people in the company, and may be that is an issue. I wonder if in Japanese society, people who are older especially women, cannot apply for certain jobs.

-- They tend to have preconceived ideas but you should publicize and give opportunities to women.

Mary: The last time I put out an ad, I actually said, "Mature." I was looking for people with experience in life and not someone straight out of university, fresh and green.

Mark: We would like to take advantage of the situation. If there are millions of women and older people out there, we would be happy to have them working for us. If we could make a connection with them, it would be great.

Mary: What we are saying is that in Japanese society if there are diversity and prejudices that go on, for a company like us, it would be an advantage. Then, we could have people working for us. If all the Japanese companies are after those people too, then, we would not be able to hire them.

--They can choose their working hours or time?

Mark: In our company, the most important thing is that the magazine and website are working. It does not matter when they come in, as long as their work is done.

Mary: As long as it does not cause inconvenience with the other people that they are supposed to be working with. Within reason, some wish to come in at 9:30, 10 or 11, they can come in. There is no clock.

Mark: I hate the clock. There is no checking in.

Mary: We expect people to do their job and not to cause any inconvenience. For example, you can't come in at 5 o'clock and say, "I'm going to work until midnight," unless the team has agreed that this is a good idea.

-- So it is very flexible.

Mark: It is not so much flexible. We just don't have any formal rule. The rules are set by people themselves rather than the company says, "You must do this."

Mary: Of course, if someone says, "This is great," and she comes in at lunch time everyday and goes home at 6, there will be an uncomfortable feeling. Other people will start to say something, so that will not work. They manage themselves within the group.

Mark: It is not so much top down. We tell everyone the general idea rather than the rules, and to make the best environment and the best end results.

VI Towards Freedom, Creativity, Opportunity, and Work Life Balance

-- In this situation, when you consider about the strengths and weaknesses of your foreign workers and Japanese workers, do you have any comments?

Mary: Well, I can make up generalizations. I think culturally Japanese staff is more used to having rules, and I think some Japanese staff find it more difficult in the beginning. They'd like to come to a foreign company, because they know that things are going to be more flexible, but they are used to a different way from before, so it takes a little bit of an adjustment.

Mark: They have been abroad so we come in and they say, "I can be in Japan but have quite a free environment. I can be in control of myself." They build up their independence first and then, they have their interdependence with other people. We want them to build up their independence, and I find people who are independent and who can work on their own whether foreign or Japanese. We don't want to be managing them all the time.

-- Within your company when you decide on a topic or a feature, do you have an editorial board? As a woman, you actually sit on the board; do you have other members in the company?

Mark: We have actually an independent management structure. When we hire, we try to let them just do their job. We kind of give them guidelines about community issues and interesting things that affect the community. We let the editors do their work themselves. They come up with most of the ideas.

Mary: We used to be very involved in these issues such as next week's feature, etc. Over the years, we have evolved the business to give the people self-responsibility and self-management. I guess that comes from us, because that is our style of working. We just like to tell the general aim of what you have to do and just get on with it. Figure out the details as we go. Some people have different management structure or working structure. They like to sit down and discuss everything first and get all the details sorted out. Our company culture is not to do that. We say, "Let's just do it, and we will figure it out as we go."

Mark: Sometimes we will see an issue and address that. Let me show you the recent issues we have done. One is on "The Glass Ceiling in Japan." It is about Japanese women who are breaking through and succeeding in the workforce. We have this other one. Article about Japanese black community... a sub-culture.

-- This one is on the Finnish man who became naturalized Japanese citizen and became elected in the Diet.

Mark: We had an interview on what he is trying to do to promote diversity and what his personal ideas have conflict with his party. Often we will do articles directly related to the community or on social issues in Japan. All 3 of these were done by the editors.

-- So you want to give them the freedom, creativity, and the opportunity.

Mary: We usually set the end results. This is what has to be done. How you get to that point, you have certain flexibilities of how you do that.

-- You are a magazine that expects to have leaders all year round. I am wondering if you can have a vacation.

Mark: No problem.

-- Work life balance?

Mark: Work like balance is very important in this company. I feel strongly about it. In Japanese publishing companies they work their staff very hard. I have some friends working 24 hours a day, sleeping in the office all the time.

Mary: Working on weekends without any holidays.

--How do you manage?

Mark: We are different from that. I believe people should work, and if you want to do something else, you do that other thing that has nothing to do with your work. You can free your mind and then, come back to work the next day and do your work; there is a need for a clean separation between work and your personal life.

Mary: So we encourage people to take their vacations. Some people say, "I wasn't able to because I didn't have someone to cover for me." We say, "Well, that is an issue you should bring up. We would try to find someone to cover." We like people to take their vacations.

--When you say vacation, is it 2 weeks, one month, or just 3 days?

Mary: When someone starts in the company, they would start with 15 days vacation per year. Each year it builds up by a day. There is one lady who has been with us for 10 years, so she has 25 days of paid vacation.

-- *Fabulous!*

Mary: We would like to have people get their work done in the work hours, and for them to go home and see their family or do something else. Apparently in Japanese companies there is a kind of culture of having to stay to a certain time, maybe 9 o'clock at night or you have to stay until the boss leaves. We have someone working for us and can get their job done efficiently, smart, and out the door, we say, "Great, that is very good!"

Mark: We are very happy. We don't give them more work. A while back we had a staff member who was overworked. She would stay quite late several times a week. If that happens, we ask them, "Is this going to continue?" Then, we have to hire someone else part-time and build up the business. As you build up something, of course, you have to work. May be you may have to do some more work.

Mary: We expect some overtime. When overtime is needed, we expect people to do it. But we don't want this to be the general case.

Mark: I think it is wrong of employers to take advantage of their staff.

Mary: When people do work overtime, we give them time off to compensate for that overtime. Someone has to work on a Saturday, but then they can take another day off. We would rather have them take time off than make more money.

Mark: I personally think this is a big issue in Japan. To build a culture to separate from work and leisure, so that the leisure time and building up of the leisure sector are possible. People can leave work and do something else. I think it makes people more productive.

Mary: and happier.

--*Most of them are married?*

Mark: May be about 30%.

Mary: No.

Mark: About 35%?

-- That's all right. Actually I am not interested in the percentage. I want to ask a very interesting question. In Japan the average minutes of the conversation between husband and wife in a day is about 10 minutes. Then, how do you make a guess about your married staff?

Mary: They leave work on time usually, so I don't know if they go home to talk to their wives or husbands or go to a bar. I don't know. They have plenty of time to talk to them. Whether they do or not, I am not sure. We are done with our 10 minutes in the first 10 minutes of the morning.
(Laughter)

--Please ask them if you have the opportunity. (Laughter)

Mary: In Japan, since men are working long hours, they don't get to see their children. That's such a shame.

-- In that sense, you really promote work life balance.

Mary: Oh, yes!

-- Even men should spend more time with their children, taking them to kindergarten and schools. Do you do that too, Mark?

Mark: I take my son to school. I take him to the park in the afternoon.

Mary: Mark is a very active father. I am very lucky. I think the children see you more than me.

--Active father, active husband! In terms of household chores, do you share them, too?

Mark/Mary: Not so much. We have a lady who helps us. That's because on the weekend we don't want to spend time cleaning and doing household chores, because we have been working all week. We want to spend the time with our children. We want to play and relax with them. We have a lady who helps us at home, who does all the cleaning.

-- *Is this a Japanese lady?*

Mary: She is a Filipino lady. There are many Filipino ladies, who come to Japan to help the foreign families. This is a wonderful service.

--*Are they staying in Japan legally or illegally?*

Mary: Legally. In Japan, with us we have investor visas or with senior manager visas, we can sponsor a maid. We can actually sponsor 2 maids.

--*You are very much qualified. What about your staff?*

Mark: Sometimes they have part-time maids. They have someone. The cost is reasonable.

VII Don't Second Guess but Seek the Essence Within

-- Basically we hear you really help to break down stereotypes, which is really what diversity is all about. Now if you would like to give a final message to the Japanese society.

Mark: Many years ago when I was about 14 or 15, my mother had come back from PTA at school. This has nothing to do with diversity. This is about a story written by a child, and my Mom showed me, but it had terrible spelling. The story was very interesting. She showed it to me, and it was very good. All the parents at PTA were saying that it was terrible, but what my mother was telling me, I realized was that the form may not be the same as the substance, or the spelling or appearance was bad, but we have to look past that to see something in there. That feeling has stayed with me all these years trying to look through. We were discussing this.

Mary: Very interesting idea.

Mark: I was thinking about the song, "Imagine." Everyone thinks that this song is by John Lennon, but actually Yoko Ono wrote the words for the song. I think that is one of the things we can see where you have an impression of something.

Mary: Everyone thought this was British, Beatles, John Lennon and he had this beautiful idea about people living in harmony and there should be no racism or prejudice or one religion. This was actually written by a Japanese woman.

Mark: Actually the combination of the two had made it into something very special. The song was No. 1, the song of our century.

-- Even now.

Mary: It was about diversity.

Mark: I suppose that's what I think about, though it may be idealistic. If you wish a message about diversity, it is something to think about this song. Not only about the meaning of the words, but how it was put together, and the story of their relationship.

--Thinking back on your conversation, your business being a gateway, I think that it would become very big in the future.

Mark: We need to make the gateway wider.

-- You will have a lot of elderly people retiring. They need something to do. If you can create a business within your expertise, possibly interesting things can happen.

Mark: I know older people use the Internet to talk with their children and grandchildren. Maybe we will start to see older people around the world meeting and talking with each other. Actually our business is going there. Some of the things we are doing now, which is not only for Japan but making a system of international friendship. It does not matter which country.

Mark/Mary: When we do something on the Internet, it goes out to the whole world. We are trying to bring more people from all over the world together!

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