

August 15th, 2022

CEO Insight: Learning from Japan means learning hope

The famous designer Issey Miyake survived the atomic bomb of Hiroshima as a child; his mother died in agony from radiation sickness after suffering for three years. But the revolutionary artist kept his dark experiences to himself, preferring to express his great joy in human life with light, colorful creations.

His native Japan is constantly threatened by earthquakes, tsunamis, typhoons, volcanic eruptions, and floods. But after each disaster, the Japanese soon look forward again. They have learned about crisis and how to deal with it. For example, after the quake, tsunami, and nuclear accident in March 2011, the entire nation learned to conserve electricity so the economy could get back on its feet.

Miyake and his compatriots are united by their inner attitude. "Design needs to express hope," said the fashion designer, who died Aug. 5 at age 84. Despite the childhood trauma, he achieved great innovations and designs. In the same spirit, the Japanese repeatedly overcame even severe national setbacks in a remarkably short time with great optimism. From this, we can all learn to accept hardship and sorrow and shape the future with positive energy.

Born in Hiroshima on April 22, 1938, [Miyake](#) was only seven years old when the U.S. atomic bombing devastated the city. "When I close my eyes, I still see things no one should ever experience", he wrote in a 2009 [editorial](#) for The New York Times. But he prefers to think of things "that can be created and not destroyed, and that bring beauty and joy."

He pursued his career without looking back - he didn't want to be called "the designer who survived the atomic bomb." Instead, his name should be associated with his high-tech fashion techniques.

He developed a new method for folding fabric by wrapping it between layers of paper in a hot press. This resulted in his phenomenally successful "Pleats, Please" line.

His Bao Bao bags, made of small polyvinyl triangles, were celebrated for their technique and counterfeited en masse because of their popularity. He also designed Apple founder Steve Jobs' famous black turtleneck sweater. His fashion was meant to play a role in the question for human existence.

The Japanese demonstrated a similar spirit of innovation after the quake and tsunami disaster in Tohoku and the nuclear accident in Fukushima in the spring of 2011 when the country had to make do suddenly with around a quarter less electricity; the triple disaster had paralyzed many power plants.

After several weeks of rolling blackouts, the nation switched [fully to energy conservation](#). Every citizen and every business now tried to use less electricity, spurred by nationwide information campaigns. Rail operators, for example, canceled many services, slowed the speed of their trains, and shut down many escalators in stations. In high-rise buildings, stair climbing was the order of the day, and many elevators remained out of service. On the ceilings of offices, stores, and supermarkets, incandescent and neon lights were turned off. Air conditioning systems cooled rooms less. The manufacturing sector reduced production somewhat during the day and shifted some of it to early morning and late evening or the weekend.

In this way, Japan ultimately managed surprisingly well to cope with the sudden loss of large parts of its energy supply and avoided a prolonged recession and higher job losses. Today, the experience gained then is helping the Japanese to save electricity and gas again to weather the new shortages due to the Russia-Ukraine war.

If all sectors from industry to private households follow suit, there is more room for maneuver in energy consumption than might appear at first glance. With its confident and pragmatic approach, Japan could therefore provide a practical role model for Germany in dealing with an electricity and gas shortage in the coming winter - another example of how learning from Japan means learning hope.

Leonard Meyer zu Brickwedde

Dr. Leonard Meyer zu Brickwedde
President and CEO

Kensho Investment Corporation
Sanno Park Tower 3F
2-11-1 Nagata-cho,
Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo 100-6162

Tel: +81(0)3-6205-3039
contact@ken-sho-investment.com