Interview with Akiyo Kawamura

Akiyo Kawamura is an 18-year MDRT member with five Court of the Table qualifications. She served as Membership Communications Committee Zone Chair for Japan in 2005, and was chair of MDRT Japan in 2006. Kawamura specializes in business insurance and individual financial planning. She established Bonne Co. Ltd. to provide financial advice in collaboration with tax accountants, and is actively involved in several charities, including fundraising for the Daddy-Long-Legs Scholarship for children who have lost a parent.

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How did you come to be in this industry/business?

I had an accessory design business with my friend. After many years of hard work, our business was finally on track, but it was at the price of my health. I became ill and could not work for nearly one year. When I was ready to work, I was not young enough for most job opportunities. An advertisement from a domestic life insurance company announcing the launch of a new sales force with a brand new concept caught my eye. I knew almost nothing about insurance, but I didn't have many options. I was very fortunate to have good customers who showed trust in me and, because of them, I was able to survive in this business even after bankruptcy and multiple M&As of my primary company.

What area of the industry/business do you specialize in?

Once I learned more about life insurance, I was excited about the role and magic of insurance. The concept of helping each other was also encouraging to me. My manager made us visit offices of tax accountants and make cold calls. I visited hundreds of tax accountants to make them "introductory agents." (They refer business to us and get 50 percent of the FYC. No longer available). Many of my colleagues left the business, but I survived because I could appreciate my health and was happy to have a job. Things went well and I was one of the top producers in the company.

All of a sudden, on June 4, 1999, a client called my cell phone while I was at the Management Council Meeting of JAIFA. He told me that my company went bankrupt and he was outrageously upset. I knew nothing about the situation of my company.

The bankruptcy of an insurance company was new to Japan and most of the business I had through tax accountants was cancelled. During a crisis, you really find out the true personality and true dignity of a person. Very few clients, however, encouraged me and believed in me and continued their policies. It was a new beginning for me.

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Of course, selling insurance was easier decades ago, but I can now say that I know the depth and truth of financial advice. Through my hard-earned experience, I have a stronger commitment to continue in this business no matter what.

I am currently working in two markets:

1. Working with tax accountants
2. Female business owners

How do you market it?

Referrals from tax accountants are still a good source of business, but more business and more quality business come from my existing clients, many of whom are female business owners. They come to me with a variety of problems.

It is a natural fit because I can share sympathy and empathy with female business owners. I want them to be successful. They are my role models and good friends. To be a problem solver, I have to be more than an insurance sales person. I continue my education, not only in finance, but in a variety of fields, so I can be the person they come to.

In a sense, I'm like a water bird. I try to look cool, calm, and confident, but underneath the water, I'm paddling hard to move forward. And, my ultimate goal is to be a Whole Person. This is going to be a journey of a lifetime and I was fortunate to find a destination.

Real story

Years ago, I recommended a key insurance person to a company. My recommendation was to use life insurance to fund their condolence allowance at the premature death of executives as a fringe benefit. It took nearly two years to close this deal.

One of the executives was a young gentleman, and later he asked me to review his individual life insurance program for his family. During the interview, Mr. Young Executive said he wanted to give his two children a college education in the United States. He was in his 40s and his children were still very young. I remember that day clearly because cherry blossoms were in full bloom and he said he liked to keep the office windows open for fresh air. The tree was so close to the window that you could almost reach out and touch the flowers.

Only three years later, an unbelievable thing happened, just like it does in drama. He was diagnosed with cancer and passed away only a few months later. The widow was much younger than I am. She was almost in a panic, but I was able to assure her that her husband had provided enough money for her and their children.

I told her about the dream her husband had for their children's education. I helped her coordinate her financial plan and purchased some life insurance on her life. She was in tears when things were settled. Many years later, their son went to a university in America, and their daughter will also go to an American college this year.

I meet the widow every year in the spring to review her plan. I witnessed that money in need will give strength to the widow to continue to live. Life insurance is magic. We deliver a bouquet of love when money is needed most. I am very proud of what I do, and I am committed to do the best job I can do and continue to become the best person I can be.

What challenge do you see for our industry and how do you plan on making it an opportunity?

When things get tough, like bankruptcy of your insurance carrier, there is not much you can do except to continue to be the best you can be. I encourage you to continue to learn new knowledge, ideas, and be inspired.

Don't look for the easy sale, but build a strong relationship with your clients. After all, the magnitude of your success will depend on the quality of your clients, not on the amount of the sale you made.