



EDITORIAL

GENICHI KAWAKAMI R.I.P.

In April of 1945, a U.S. bombing raid reduced the city of Hamamatsu to a charred ruin and leveled all but one of Yamaha's factories. Four months later, nuclear blasts devastated Hiroshima and Nagasaki, bringing the War in the Pacific to a close. With Japan in a state of ruin, the conditions were hardly ripe for building any business, let alone one engaged in manufacturing a discretionary item like the piano. Yet this crushing adversity hardly slowed Genichi Kawakami as he led Yamaha out of the ashes to become the world's largest manufacturer of musical products. In a storied career, Kawakami, who died last month, also launched Yamaha Motors, now the world's second largest manufacturer of motorcycles, the Yamaha Music Foundation, which operates 7,500 music schools worldwide, and a chain of resort hotels in Japan. The story of this remarkable career stands as

a reminder of how the right person at the right point in time can dramatically shape the course of events.

Despite a humbling record of accomplishment, Kawakami liked to deprecate his abilities. In a 1987 *Music Trades* interview, he joked, "My father told me that to be successful, a man had to be intelligent, cultured, and honest. All I had was honesty. But at least I tried hard." In addition to "trying hard," he was gifted with the ability to envision nearly impossible goals and to inspire legions of talented individuals to make the vision a reality.

After a 1953 tour of the world's major piano makers, Kawakami returned to Japan committed to making Yamaha a world-class manufacturer. Ten years later, by sheer force of will, he accomplished

that goal. How do you sell Western musical instruments in a country with no Western musical tradition? Kawakami addressed that challenge by founding the Yamaha Music School, which went on to educate millions of young pianists and contributed to making Japan one of the world's most musical societies. He also pushed Yamaha into electronics and wind instrument manufacturing.

Although he lived through a hellish post-war environment with Yamaha employees reduced to sleeping in trenches covered with cardboard, Kawakami never harbored any resentment towards the U.S. He once said, "General Douglas MacArthur is one of my heroes. After World War II, we expected retribution from the U.S., yet MacArthur came in a spirit of generosity and helped us rebuild. We would not have succeeded without him."

In transforming Yamaha from an obscure Japanese piano-maker into a formidable world-class competitor, Kawakami took himself out of the running in any industry-wide popularity contests. Co-workers remember him as a forceful and sometimes intimidating personality; however, through a legacy of quality products and a global commitment to increase music-making worldwide, he made an unrivaled contribution to the industry. His was the type of extraordinary talent that occurs infrequently, and his memory should remain an inspiration.

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