

APEC WEF 2017

APEC Business Efficiency and Success Target AWARD

Good morning, Ms. Natalia Strigunova, Deputy Director, ladies, and gentlemen.

Congratulations for this second APEC BEST AWARD.

I am greatly honored to have been invited again this year.

The BEST AWARD is a very significant award.

It gives participants the chance to take their first step in the global development of their business, and helps empower and raise the awareness of women wanting to start their own new business.

I would like to express my heartfelt respect for all of your efforts in making this award possible for a second year.

Before I became Mayor of Yokohama, I worked in the private sector for 45 years.

At my first job, I was limited to being a simple assistant to the male workers, but after going through many jobs, I was finally able to become an automobiles salesperson.

I was the only woman working in sales at my office.

By fully utilizing my feminine side, I listened to customers with empathy, responded to their needs and within a month, I had become the top salesperson in the office.

I later became branch manager and I focused on the power of empathy and open-mindedness when communicating with my staff, especially when they were not selling well.

I took time to listen, to understand their views, praise their efforts and encourage them.

Gradually, they started to open up their minds and the sales performance of the office greatly improved.

Around that time, I was head-hunted by a competitor, and offered a job as their president.

They persuaded me by saying they wanted me to use my capabilities to “lead their employees in achieving happiness at work”.

So in 1999 I became the President of what is now Volkswagen Japan Sales.

A few years later, I was asked to become CEO of a nationwide supermarket chain that was facing management difficulties and I worked on the rebuilding of the company.

However, despite the fact that 80% of the customers and employees were female, all of the members of the board of directors were men except for me.

This caused a major divergence in awareness between the management and the workplace.

I repeatedly visited various branches and communicated with numerous customers and employees.

I shared with them my viewpoints and opinions both as a woman and as a person.

Throughout the years, I have seen many promising women forced to give up their work in order to raise their children.

This has fueled my motivation as the Mayor of Yokohama to support working women.

At times, even I felt uneasy in the male-dominant Japanese society, but I never stopped challenging myself to reach my full potential, and I am now convinced that in the end, it is “love” that truly pushes people to act.

I would like to encourage all of you here today to take a risk and keep challenging yourselves.

It will surely lead you to encounter wonderful people and bring you growth.

Being a woman can also be a strength.

Your endeavors will pave the way for the next generation of women leaders.

In Yokohama City, we are helping women to succeed in various ways.

We are currently focusing on assisting women in starting new businesses.

We offer them a wide range of support for each phase of their business development, and include management consultations, low-interest loans, the setting up of shared offices, and large-scale promotion.

Over the past six years, 221 women have started their own business with the help of this program, with an 80% success rate.

We are also actively promoting exchanges of opinions between female entrepreneurs around the world, such as those in the Republic of the Philippines and in several African countries.

I am proud to say that Yokohama is the leading city in Japan in these fields.

I hope all of you will fully capitalize on the opportunity offered by the APEC BEST AWARD to broaden your network and develop your business.

And, in the near future, I hope that you will expand your business to include the City of Yokohama.

The world is looking forward to the global success of all of you.

Thank you very much.