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‘Socializing’ is important for successful international partnerships

A global health solutions company founded over 400 years ago

President Matsuzawa: Today, I am speaking with CEO Kenichi Matsumoto of Sakura Global Holding Co., Ltd., a Vice Chairman and Director of The International Friendship Exchange Council (FEC). I have travelled with CEO Matsumoto to many countries in delegations. Firstly, please give me an overview of your company.

CEO Matsumoto: Sakura Global Holding is a medical equipment manufacturer and global health solutions company involved in cleaning and sterilizing operations that contribute to infection prevention in medical treatment locations and diagnostic pathology operations that contribute to the streamlining and optimization of the confirmation of cancer diagnoses. Our technology is used for infection control not only in medical institutions, but also in life science fields, such as medicine, vaccines, and conditioning and water treatment equipment. In addition, we promote the “full automation of pathology”, which is the key to solving problems in diagnostic pathology operations. The Group has now expanded globally to over 150 countries worldwide through the locations of Sakura Finetek USA, Sakura Finetek Europe (in Holland, with subsidiaries in 14 countries), and Sakura Medical Science Technology (Taizhou) Co., Ltd. in China.

President Matsuzawa: Your company has a history.

CEO Matsumoto: Our company was founded in Nihonbashi, Tokyo in 1871. Its history starts over 400 years earlier with a pharmacy in Sakai, Senshu region that was relocated to Nihonbashi in Edo with the establishment of the Shogunate. We are 17 generations removed from our founder Kyuzaemon Matsumoto. My father Zenjirou died suddenly in 1973, and I became company president at age 36. I am the 17th-generation head of the family, but I value business succession over ancestry and believe that an heir does not necessarily have to take over the family business, so it is different from a so-called family business.

Group’s global expansion

Sakura Finetek USA

Sakura Finetek Europe

Sakura Medical Science Technology (Taizhou) Co., Ltd. (China)

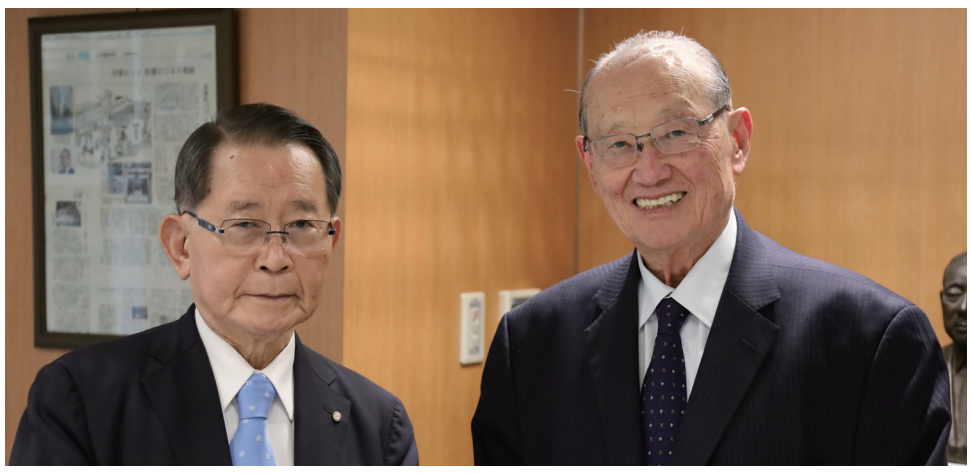
The challenges and strategies as a pioneer of expansion into Europe and the United States

President Matsuzawa: I imagine that becoming CEO at a young age and taking charge on the front lines for over 50 years must have been difficult. Please tell me about your company’s overseas expansion.

CEO Matsumoto: In 1963, we participated in the “International hospital equipment and medical equipment exhibition”, which was held in London at the time, and exhibited our main products. We went straight to Europe, the United States, and Canada and achieved great results. This was the first step of our overseas expansion. Global expansion is not simply a matter of expanding in scale. Even with the same sales of ¥50 billion, market share is greatly affected by whether the market scale is ¥100 billion or ¥1 trillion. For this very reason, our company specialized in two fields, infection control and diagnostic pathology, and promoted global niche strategies.

President Matsuzawa: I see. I was involved in overseas business from the 1960s, but the economic power of Japan was still a long way off, and I understand how difficult it was to expand overseas at that time. I would like to hear about the turning point in your company’s international expansion.

CEO Matsumoto: One was a partnership with the American Sterilizer Company, the world’s leading manufacturer in the medical equipment field, in 1970. We integrated the advanced


CEO Matsumoto (left) and President Matsuzawa

technology of American Sterilizer, which laid the foundation for the Sakura Group to expand into the global market.

Moreover, in 1971, we formed a sales partnership with Miles-Sankyo (which had its headquarters in Tokyo), a company that imported and sold laboratory-test reagents and medical equipment. The partnership with Miles was not limited merely to product sales. By supplying products to Miles as an OEM, the high level of Sakura’s technology became known globally.

I feel that the building of personal relationships, in other words, socializing, is important to make partnerships with such foreign companies successful.

After that, we established a local subsidiary, Sakura Finetek USA, in Torrance, California in 1986 and built a company building of 10,000 tsubo (about 355,832 sq. feet) in the same location in 1998. This was an expression of our readiness to go beyond a mere sales location and to lay down roots in the American market and aim for long-term sales growth.

President Matsuzawa: This was over 20 years ago, but I remember being very moved when I saw your company’s impressive building alongside those of Toyota, Honda, and Panasonic when I visited Torrance on a business trip.

CEO Matsumoto: Thank you. We are moving forward with business expansion in Europe and China in the same way.

Exchanges with Cuba and redevelopment through ODA

President Matsuzawa: Speaking of overseas, I visited Cuba with you 10 years ago, and we exchanged opinions with government staff. Please tell me about your company’s connection with Cuba.

CEO Matsumoto: Our connection with Cuba started with us exporting products in 1970. For some time, we had kept our eyes open around the world with the idea that globalization really meant globalization, not westernization, but I think meeting the late President Fidel Castro at an exhibit held in Havana and being deeply impressed by his attitude was important.

In Cuba, we assisted with knockdown production of sterilization equipment, but the factory was forced to close in 1992 due to the worsening of Cuba’s foreign currency situation.

However, in 2016, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe became the first Japanese Prime Minister to visit Cuba, and after it was decided to advance a “medical treatment tools and materials improvement project to improve medical service in major hospitals” (ODA). As a result, Sakura’s sterilization machines were introduced not only in Cuba, but also Central and South American and African hospitals. I think that this was connected to the success of past initiatives. I have been to many countries, but Cuba is one that left a deep impression.

President Castro and CEO Matsumoto (second from right), Cuba, 1978

Former Prime Minister Abe and CEO Matsumoto (left), Uzbekistan, 2015

President Matsuzawa: I was delighted about the development after I visited Cuba with you as if it were my own achievement. I would like to hear about your foundational principles as CEO. ↗

‘I’ll take responsibility, and give you the credit’: Don’t think about your own interests

Management principles, the three spirits, and the four essentials

CEO Matsumoto: Something that I always put a high value on when managing a company is the importance of the “three spirits”.

The first is the spirit of altruism. First, I understand that there is the development of the industry as a whole, and then after that there is the growth of your company.

The second is the spirit of cooperation. Technical innovation in recent years has been remarkable. Covering it all at your company will take considerable time and money. Particularly in the high tech and digital transformation fields, open innovation is important, and cooperation with other companies is crucial.

The third is the spirit of humor. Having mental space is another way of saying this. Involving others while happily taking on things is how I live. When I have a discussion with someone, I always try to keep in mind the “Yes, but…” way of talking. Instead of dismissing a person from the start, I assent to their opinion, and then give my own. By doing so, you can exchange ideas comfortably, deepen mutual understanding, and grow connections with people.

Moreover, I have realized four essentials recently.

1) The importance of thinking from macro to micro and then acting

2) The importance of ascertaining the near future and the distant future when talking about the future

3) The importance of getting involved onsite, gaining experience, thinking, and then acting

4) The importance of getting accurate information and then acting

These days, it is easy to meet with people overseas online, but nevertheless, I think it is important to visit and meet them.

President Matsuzawa: I see. I too feel that there are things you understand for the first time by having a broad perspective, meeting people, and visiting onsite. Incidentally, I have heard that you are close with many politicians, including former Prime Minister Koizumi.

CEO Matsumoto: Through many years of experience, I have been blessed with opportunities to get to know many very important people, including former Prime Minister Koizumi. The words I received from those individuals have left a deep impression, and I really feel the importance of personal connections.

I received the following words to the question of what is necessary to be a leader.

“There are people who are born with talent or luck, but no one is born with experience with success and failure. How you gain extensive experience is important.”

I empathize deeply with those words.

For the prosperity of the entire industry

President Matsuzawa: You said that you consider not only your company but also the industry as a whole before acting. Please tell me about the current issues of the medical equipment industry.

CEO Matsumoto: When I look at the overall medical equipment industry, I think that there are three issues.

The first is the stable supply of products. There are all sorts of difficulties, including material and labor shortages.

English lesson for nurses
(Matsumoto Global Foundation)

Second is the digital transformation of medical treatment. Our company is proactively promoting digital transformation, but I think that further promotion is necessary for the industry as a whole.

The third is international expansion. To help solve these issues, I established a general incorporated foundation, the Matsumoto Global Foundation, to train the international medical care professionals who will support the next generation of healthcare.

The foundation has a partial subsidy program for nurses to present at international conferences, supports English language lessons and foreign language training for nurses and pharmacists, donates to the Tobitate! (Leap for Tomorrow) study abroad initiative of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, and also supports NPO Rocinantes and others.

Dr. Naoyuki Kawahara, chairperson of Rocinantes, has provided medical support for over 20 years in Sudan, Zambia, and other African countries. After hearing his story, the value of such field experience comes across keenly. I think it is important to have opportunities to get to know such people.

President Matsuzawa: You said that you are proactively working on environmental issues as well.

CEO Matsumoto: Yes. Our company is working on the promotion of the remanufacturing of used single-use medical equipment. It is part of our contribution to society with the objective of reducing environmental burden. Moreover, at an industry level, we launched the “Japan Remanufactured Single-use Medical Device Association” (JRSA), and the Matsumoto Global Foundation serves as secretariat.

In the EU, the remanufacturing of single-use medical equipment is promoted based on the idea of “Green Surgery” for the safety of medical treatment and the effective use of resources, and the same system was established in Japan in July 2017. Going forward, we will contribute to the realization of sustainable medical care by using limited medical resources effectively and reducing environmental burden.

President Matsuzawa: The World Expo is being held in Kansai/Osaka this year. Are there any industry related events?

CEO Matsumoto: There is a medical equipment industry event worth special mention called Japan Health. This is an international trade fair focused on medical care and healthcare that was held for the first time at INTEX Osaka in June 2025. This is an official event of EXPO 2025 in Kansai/Osaka and was held in conjunction with “Health and well-being week”. This trade fair brings together domestic and foreign medical equipment manufacturers, startups, research institutions, governmental bodies, and healthcare staff.

President Matsuzawa: Please tell me why you are involved in industry activities to such an extent.

CEO Matsumoto: The reason I am involved in industry activities is not for my own personal gain but from my desire for the development of the industry as a whole. Nevertheless, collaborating and integrating with industry rivals is never easy. If you face such situations with the attitude of “I’ll take responsibility, and give you the credit”, people will naturally take action.

I will be 90 years old by East Asian age reckoning this year. To continue contributing to society, health comes first. For that reason, every morning I stretch for 15 minutes and do 110 push-ups as part of my daily routine. For breakfast, I eat a healthy meal from a batch I made myself for the whole week. Even now, I make two domestic and/or foreign business trips a month.

President Matsuzawa: The spirit of service is important, isn’t it? I too carry out the activities of the FEC with a sense of duty to our country. Lastly, could you share a few words on your expectations for the FEC?

Expectations for the FEC

CEO Matsumoto: I have participated in many overseas delegations of the FEC. I’ve always felt strongly that the greatest strength of the FEC is the ability to meet and have concrete discussions with high-ranking government officials at our destination.

I think it’s wonderful that through high-level interactions, we are able to bring activities down to the field level in the destination country and deploy effective activities from macro to micro based on state strategies.

I sincerely hope that the FEC continues to send delegations to countries this way and contributes to the further development of public diplomacy.

President Matsuzawa: Thank you for taking time out of your busy schedule today. I sincerely offer my prayers for the further development of your company group and the activities of this organization.

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Kenichi Matsumoto was born in Tokyo in 1936. He graduated from the Department of Economics and completed a Mechanical Engineering Internship at the Faculty of Engineering at Keio University. He joined Sakura Seiki Co., Ltd. in 1961, and after acting as Board Member and President, became Chairperson in 1990. In addition to Chairperson and CEO of Sakura Global Holding and Honorary President of Sakura Finetek Japan, he is currently a Board Member of the Group companies. He served as director of industry groups, including the Japanese Society of Medical Instrumentation and currently holds roles such as President of the Japan Association of Medical Equipment Industries (a general incorporated association) and Vice President of The Japan Federation of Medical Devices Associations (a general incorporated association). In 2013, he established the Matsumoto Foundation (a general incorporated foundation) (later renamed the Matsumoto Global Foundation). He has received many honors, including the Tokyo Metropolitan Governor’s Award, the Minister of Health and Welfare’s Award, the Medal with Blue Ribbon, and the Order of the Rising Sun, Gold Rays with Neck Ribbon.