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Getting a research vessel (plus some lessons in Japanese culture)

As soon as I was reasonably certain that I would have enough confirmed commitments from the five donors who were members of the SPC, I went to Tokyo for discussions on the Japanese contribution and how it might be delivered. They had already suggested that they may make their contribution in the form of paying for several months of the costs of chartering the research vessel. I also had to make sure they were comfortable with what the other donors had agreed about payment of the money to me, and not the broader SPC. They appeared to have no problem at all with this arrangement. In reality, it made little difference to them, as in the first year at least their contribution would be in the form of payment of several months of the cost of chartering the Japanese research vessel.

The Japan Fisheries Agency had done what I had asked and searched for an appropriate vessel for me to charter. They proposed the *Hatsutori Maru No. 1*, a commercial skipjack fishing vessel of 192 Gross Register Tonnage owned by Hokoku Marine Products Co., Ltd of Japan. This vessel had proven its appropriateness for working in the survey area. It had spent two years in Papua New Guinea and was working in Fiji at the time. It was relatively old, but as a purpose-built pole and line boat, it was adequate for the task. It had a crew who had worked in the study area for several years. Plus, as it came with the expressed endorsement of the Japan Fisheries Agency, I had the comfort of knowing that if something serious went wrong with it, Japan would likely come to our assistance.

I went to Fiji in mid-June 1977 to inspect the *Hatsutori Maru No. 1*. At that time, it had been working for almost a year without a major service or overhaul. It certainly looked its age. Superficially, it looked rusty and dirty. The Hokoku Marine Products representative spent some time convincing me that it was mechanically very sound (the engine room looked crowded but spotless) and that if I agreed to a charter contract, it would be immediately returned to Japan and given a thorough overhaul, including repainting. I remained a little apprehensive, but when the representative assured me that the structural changes to what would become the scientists' cabin and laboratory would be no problem at all, I agreed to go to Tokyo and negotiate a charter agreement with Hokoku Marine Products.

Immediately after I arrived back in Noumea from Fiji, I called my contact in the Japan Fisheries Agency. (Unfortunately, for the life of me, I cannot remember his name, even though he continued to be immensely helpful over the next three years. The name Immamura keeps coming to me, but I am by no means confident that it is. Nevertheless, I will use Immamura from here on to overcome the problem of not having a better alternative.) I asked him to arrange a time and place for me to meet with Hokoku Marine Products. I also asked him if he could ask Hokoku to send me at least one business card in English and Japanese so that I could use it to get taxis to their offices in Tokyo; using taxis in Tokyo in the 1970s was not without its problems. I asked him to also please send me a business card for himself so that I could contact him if I needed to. Within a week or so, Mr Immamura had everything in order, including the fact that the business cards were on their way, and yes, he would be very happy to help while I am in Japan. I also had a phone call from Mr Furuie, who was the CEO of Hokoku Marine Products. He seemed to want little more than to introduce himself and say he was looking forward to meeting me. We did have a brief chat about the things we would need to discuss, like the price of the charter and how long it would be. I suggested nine months, but obviously, we needed to talk about this. Much would depend on the price.

I asked the commission's travel officer to book me flights to Tokyo via Sydney and return on the dates that I gave her. The return flight was to include a stopover in Sydney so that I could do some business in the city (visit the Commonwealth Bank to discuss the programme's bank account and the transactions that had now started). Two days later, the travel officer came to my office; she was clearly a little distressed. The director of programmes had told her to change my bookings so that I flew Air Nauru, which did not go to Tokyo; the only city in Japan at which it had landing

rights was Kagoshima, and I would have to change planes there to go to Tokyo. I would also have to overnight in Nauru on my way. I was not amused. I took it to be the director of programmes' attempt to indicate to me that he was still in charge. I was reluctant to make a fuss over it because I did not want to get the secretary general involved again so soon. But nor did I want to add being a travel agent to the list of my responsibilities, which already included being a salesman and a banker. I would leave it for now, but put the issue on the agenda for the next meeting with the donors.

The lighter side of my changed travel arrangements was that the flight had a couple of amusing components. I had to first stop over in Nauru for the night and then fly to Kagoshima the next morning. This second flight made two stops; the last one was in Pohnpei. There were only about 20 people on the plane when we left Nauru, and at Pohnpei, the other 19 got off, leaving just me. As I got back on the plane, two hostesses (as they were called then) in their striking bright yellow uniforms greeted me at the top of the stairs with a trolley with drinks, including Champagne, being very obvious:

> Good morning, Mr Kearney. As you are probably aware, you are the only passenger on this leg of the flight to Kagoshima. We are at your service. There is plenty of food whenever you would like it, and we have lots of different beverages. We can serve you if you like, or we could leave the trolley near you so you could just serve yourself whatever and whenever. But we would like to advise you that the action on this leg of this flight will be down the back of plane where we will be playing poker with our colleagues. You are most welcome to join us at any time.

The 'action' continued at Kagoshima. At this airport in 1977, there was not a word in English that I could find. I had to walk up to a few counters and show my ticket in the hope that I could be directed to where I would board my flight to Tokyo. Eventually, this worked, and I was able to board a flight that I was reasonably sure was the right one. At take-off, all announcements were in Japanese; there was not a word in English, but this did not seem to be a problem, as I was the only obviously non-Japanese person on the flight. I had been on plenty of planes and knew what most departure announcements were about. This should not be an issue. There were two announcements during the flight, after which people adjusted their seat belts, and so the intent of the announcement was obvious.

In Tokyo I easily made my way to the taxis and thus to the Imperial Hotel; unlike today, the Imperial was rather cheap in those days. After checking in, I prepared for my meeting the next morning at 10 am. Just to be sure of my actions the next day, I showed the concierge the business card for Hokoku Marine Products and asked how long it would take to get there. He gave me an estimate, which, from memory, was less than half an hour.

The next morning, a little before 9 am, I got into one of the taxis that were queued up on the driveway of the hotel. I gave the driver the Hokoku business card. After looking at the card, he quickly got quite agitated. He eventually shouted at me. I was clearly meant to get out of his cab, which I did. I got into the next taxi and got the same treatment, just a little less shouting. So, I got out and went up to the concierge, showed him the business card and told him of my predicament. He took the business card and went up to the first cab I had been in and talked to the driver, and then the second one. Then he came back to me: 'The problem is these two drivers do not know how to get to that address'. He proceeded to walk along the line of waiting taxis, with the Hokoku business card, until he found one that would take me.

My worries were not yet over, for when the driver got to where he wanted, he made it obvious I should get out, which I did after paying him. Then I quickly realised there were no signs in English that described the building I needed. After about five minutes of looking, I did find a small brass plaque with Hokoku Marine Products on it. Into that building I went.

But my saga had only just begun. I found a door that was clearly marked Hokoku Marine Products. So, I entered. There was a reception desk with a young man behind it, and it was still only 9.55 am. I gave the young man my card and said slowly, 'I have a meeting with Mr Furuie'. He took my card and walked through the doorway behind him. He was gone for four or five minutes, and when he returned, he pointed to chairs against the wall behind me. So, I went and sat down and waited. After half an hour with nothing happening, I went again to the young man. He disappeared again through the door behind him. He was only gone for a minute this time, and when he returned, he again pointed to the chairs. So I went and sat down again, and waited, and waited. After about another 40 minutes, I had had enough. I went up to the man again and did not attempt to hide my agitation. I said, 'Please find somebody who speaks English'. He went through the door again. This time he came back with another man, of middle age. He said to me in moderately good English, 'You can come in

when Dr Kearney arrives'. I said to him, 'I am Dr Kearney, as my business card says'. He said nothing but shook his head. He went back through the door. He returned a few minutes later and immediately stated, 'You can come in when Dr Kearney arrives'. By this time, my agitation was probably showing. But what more could I do than repeat that I am Dr Kearney? He went through the door again. This time, he came back with an older gentleman. He came up to me and said, 'Who are you?' I replied, 'I am Dr Kearney'. In a back-and-forth manner, we continued: 'No, you are not'. 'Yes, I am'. 'You are not. Dr Kearney is a man of experience and authority. I have spoken to him. You are not him'.

Apart from having an identity crisis, I was not sure what to do. This older gentleman, I assumed, correctly as I would find out, was Mr Furuie; he was the one I had spoken to on the phone, and he was the boss. I was at the end of the line. Fortunately, I had Mr Immamura's card with me. I showed it to Mr Furuie and asked him to ring Mr Immamura. 'Perhaps if you talk to him, he will be able to convince you that I am, indeed, Dr Kearney?'

Mr Furuie disappeared through the door with Mr Immamura's card. After about 10 minutes, he returned. He came up to me and stated, 'We discussed you, and I accept Mr Immamura's explanation of what Dr Kearney looks like, and I accept that you are him'. He was clearly not totally convinced, and even more clearly, not happy. He then said it was now almost lunch time, and one of his people would take me to lunch. We would begin our meeting at 1 pm.

The lunch was basic and uneventful. I was in their meeting room at 12.55 pm with my notes in front of me. The meeting began about 10 minutes later. Mr Furuie was present for some of the time, but he did not speak. Two other gentlemen spoke English that was plenty good enough for a robust discussion, but we did not have one. They opened by reading a statement of about two pages, which rather succinctly covered the issues we needed to address. I was pleased that they were virtually the same as the ones on my list. The key issue, the price of the charter per month that they quoted, was quite a bit higher than the Fisheries Agency had suggested, but it was not outrageous. In any case, that is the sort of thing I was here to discuss. I responded by thanking them for their outline of what we needed to agree on, and I added a couple of points to the list. I then asked a specific question about how many months the charter should be. When I did not get a definitive answer, I suggested nine months. Again silence. So, I raised the issue that I did not yet have all the donor contributions, and

until I did, I would like to suggest that we agree on the first five months of the charter and then extend the agreement immediately once the French contribution is received. No response. When I asked them if there was any arrangement I could make on the length of the charter that might make it possible for them to reduce the monthly cost, there was silence for a while, then a different man read out the same two-page statement. After a rather pregnant silence, it was read again by a different person.

By 3 pm, I realised that we were not going to get anything meaningful achieved in the rest of the day. I decided that the most productive thing I could do would be to go back to my hotel and call Mr Immamura and ask him if we could possibly meet at a place of his choosing, to discuss what I needed to do. I was seriously concerned. I simply had to be able to charter a suitable vessel, or else there could be no Skipjack Programme.

We called the meeting off at 3.30 pm, and they arranged a taxi to pick me up and take me back to the hotel.

When I got to my room, I immediately called Mr Immamura. I was delighted when he quickly agreed that we needed to meet. He suggested the bar in my hotel. He said that he needed to make a few phone calls, after which he would go to the Imperial Hotel and meet me at 7 pm. I had seldom looked forward to a business meeting so much. I certainly needed help.

Mr Immamura was punctual. I led him to what appeared to be an executive bar and immediately offered him a drink. When he suggested a whiskey, I asked the waiter for two very good whiskies. This was not a time to be frugal about the cost of a drink. When the bill accompanied the two drinks, my lack of knowledge of Japanese customs relating to the price of the best whiskey in a top-level bar was further exposed, but $37 (in 1977, this equates to more than $300 today) for two whiskeys was the least of my worries.

Mr Immamura had called Mr Furuie and discussed our predicament. The issue of my not being Dr Kearney was easily explained. But they simply could not believe that somebody my age (Mr Furuie thought that I could even be not much more than 40 years old, and it was best he didn't find out I was 32) could be in a position to negotiate a charter agreement for more than half a million dollars. And on his own. I wasn't old enough to have had sufficient experience with any of the key issues of running a fishing vessel the size of the *Hatsutori Maru*, let alone adequate experience with

the financial issues associated with reaching a binding agreement for this amount of money. He was not convinced that my signature would carry the necessary authority. Therefore, there was little point in negotiating.

Running out and getting my hair bleached was not going to do it; they had already met me in the flesh anyway.

The second major concern Mr Furuie and his team had was that they found it impossible to accept that one person, regardless of their age, could negotiate a contract such as we were planning. Surely, I should have a team to consult with! Mr Immamura had a plan. He felt that if I could turn up for the meeting with three or four other people, this would be considered a mark of respect for their concerns and the Japanese tradition of doing business. These extra people did not have to say anything in the meeting, except to appear attentive when I turned to them and said something – anything!

I had a suggestion, but I was worried it might be testing the resolve of the donor governments of the Skipjack Programme a bit too much at this early stage. However, I did not have a lot of alternatives. I would contact the embassies of each of the donors and ask them to lend me a staff member for at least a couple of days, to sit behind me at meetings. These staff members did not need to be diplomats: they could be drivers or cleaners or whatever, but older men would be the most highly qualified for the task. Mr Immamura thought it better if they were not Japanese. That way, it was more likely they were truly representatives of their respective embassies.

We discussed a plan, over a second whiskey, and agreed that first thing the next morning, Mr Immamura would ring Mr Furuie and ask him to put our meeting back to the afternoon, perhaps 2 pm. He would only then ring me if there was a problem, which there should not be because our meeting was currently scheduled to begin at 10 am. I would ring the embassies of Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the United States – those countries had already funded the Skipjack Programme – in search of staff. Overnight, I modified this a little by deciding to ring the Australian Embassy first and confirm that they thought my plan to have each embassy lend me one or two staff members for a couple of days was a good one.

The next morning, I was most impressed that when I rang the Australian Embassy, I quickly ascertained that they knew I was in Tokyo and why I was there. I assumed that Bill Fisher, the Australian consul general to New Caledonia, had been at work. I was almost immediately put through to the ambassador. He understood my problem and thought my plan was a good

one, and he would be pleased to help. He would send a senior driver to the Hokoku Marine Products building at 1 pm, and he would be very happy to contact the other embassies on my behalf and ask them to do at least the same. He was very confident that they would agree. A primary responsibility of the embassy staff was to encourage and facilitate business between Australia and Japan. And this was business the Australian Government was paying for.

Shortly after 1 pm, the Australian driver turned up, as did two New Zealanders, an American and two Brits. The two Kiwis, one male and one female, were actually diplomats, a bit younger than the ideal, but to my great surprise, they actually knew quite a lot about the Skipjack Programme and were interested in it. They were looking forward to sitting in on the negotiations. I cleared with them that if the opportunity arose, I might even ask them to comment on New Zealand's support for the programme and their hope that the chartered vessel would go to New Zealand at some stage. I asked them to make a point of talking to the Hokoku staff about the programme during coffee breaks. They were definitely not just 'rent a crowd'. They were very good.

At the start of the meeting, I introduced my new support team as members of the embassies of the countries that, like Japan, were supporting the Skipjack Programme and thus contributing financially to the charter of the *Hatsutori Maru*. Mr Furuie's face lit up, and so did the mood around the room. Just the fact that four embassies had immediately come to my support appeared to be a big factor.

One of Hokoku's senior staff opened the discussion by saying that they had been thinking of Dr Kearney's question of yesterday relating to the length and cost of the charter. They thought that this was an excellent place to begin negotiations, and they would start by stating that, obviously, the length and price of the charter were related. And yes, there was room for them to reduce the asking price if an agreement was reached on other aspects. I could not believe the depth of the transformation from the day before.

By the end of the afternoon, we had a tentative agreement on most of the major issues, including a commitment to a five-month charter until the French contribution was received. Then it would go to nine months with agreement on the possibility that 10 months could be an option, if I had enough money and, of course, the price was within my range. The asking

price had already come down to approximately $60,000 per month, with the acknowledged possibility that it may come down further, particularly if I agreed to the full 10-month charter.

We had agreed in principle that during the refurbishing of the *Hatsutori Maru*, I would send one of my staff to work with them on the modifications to the scientists' cabin, including the lengthening of at least two of the bunks and the construction of a wet laboratory where fish could be gutted and baitfish analysed. Hokoku also agreed to help my staff member purchase the necessary scientific equipment, including microscopes and glassware. I offered to transfer money to them in advance of these purchases. They were not worried about prepayment; they were happy to pay for this equipment and send us a bill.

The day ended with us having made what I thought was incredible progress. There were still lots of important details, like the demarcation of authority between the responsibilities of the captain of the vessel and the senior scientist on board at the time. But we had already agreed that this would be within the general parameters of the scientist deciding on where the vessel went, with the captain having absolute authority over how the vessel got there.

I was hugely relieved. I had little doubt our relationship was now on a sufficiently firm base that we could rationally deal with any likely issues. Mutual respect had been established.

I then spoke to my 'staff' and, after thanking them profusely, asked them about coming back tomorrow. Their embassies had all committed to two days at least, so this was not an issue.

Back at the hotel, I called Mr Immamura to thank him. He had already spoken to Mr Furuie, who he said was very pleased with the way things had gone.

The next day saw very cordial discussions on most aspects of what I expected of the vessel and its crew. We had little difficulty agreeing on all key subjects, such as the countries we would visit and the likely order in which we would visit them and the length of time we anticipated staying in each. I would be responsible for making sure each country was in agreement that the vessel was welcome and could fish for tuna and baitfish in most areas; I would ascertain if there were particular areas where we should not fish, and I would advise the captain before the vessel arrived in each country of where

restricted areas were. Hokoku agreed that they would be responsible for arranging technical issues, such as where the vessel could berth and purchase fuel and provisions. I was particularly pleased when they suggested only one or perhaps sometimes two days per month would be spent in port.

At the end of the third day, Mr Furuie asked me to keep the next evening free because he would like to take me to dinner. Our relationship was now definitely on a sound footing.

By the end of Thursday, we had reached an agreement on all substantive issues, including that the last day would be spent going over the draft agreement. They were happy that my 'staff' would be surplus to requirements for this purpose.

The dinner was memorable. It was at one of Tokyo's best French restaurants.

I was well pleased with the document that we had agreed to by the end of Friday, particularly the price of the charter at approximately $56,000 per month, with some additional costs for victualing and salaries for the Fijian crew. The best estimate I could make for the total monthly cost was $60,000. Most importantly, I felt confident that the relationship with Hokoku Marine Products was strong enough that if problems were to arise, we could agree on solutions. One interesting aside was that before we broke for lunch, Mr Furuie rather sheepishly asked me if I minded if 10 people took me to lunch. I had no problem at all, but I was curious. Only one of the 10 spoke English, and none of them had been at our meeting, so the need for this gathering was beyond me. The meal was at a very good restaurant, and it was excellent and expensive.

From memory, there were some small changes in minor items in the draft agreement, and the final version was signed at the SPC on August 23 and by Hokoku Marine Products in Tokyo on September 1. The fieldwork of the Skipjack Programme officially commenced when the *Hatsutori Maru No. 1* arrived in Kavieng, Papua New Guinea, on October 5, 1977. Skipjack fishing commenced the next day.

Successive Charter Agreements

Approximately a year later, I was back in Tokyo to negotiate the terms of the second year of the charter agreement. It was now accepted that I was indeed Dr Kearney. In fact, my stature had increased to the point that I was

now Kearney-san. As all payments had been received on time by Hokoku Marine Products, my authority to negotiate and to pay bills was no longer in question. My age had not changed a lot, but still, my 'staff' would no longer be required. I had been planning to bring at least one of my scientists with me if that had been necessary.

I had been delighted with the performance of the vessel and crew. After the very poor fishing in the first month (see Chapter 14), the rest of the fieldwork had gone better than I had expected. Equally relevant to the discussions on the costs and conditions of the next year of the charter was that international currency exchange rates had gone in my favour to a significant degree. But my windfall was largely at the expense of Hokoku Marine Products. I had come to Tokyo prepared to commit at least a bit more money relative to the previous year and was prepared for a significant increase in the asking price based on exchange rate issues. The previous year, the US dollar had been worth 270 Yen, and this year it was only 195 Yen.

Our meeting opened with both parties being in a very good mood; the atmosphere was wonderfully informal. I began by saying how pleased I was with the performance of the *Hatsutori Maru* and its crew. All the arrival and departure times had been met, and all the countries and territories in whose waters we had operated were both impressed and pleased. The fisheries officers from the various island states had greatly enjoyed their time on the *Hatsutori Maru*. Mr Furuie responded by saying how pleased they were with the year. In preparation for the day's meeting, he had contacted all the crew to seek their intentions on committing to another year of the same. He was delighted to report that every one of the crew wished to do it all again for the full 10 months. They had enjoyed the tagging and bait-fishing work, interacting with our scientists and seeing all the new countries and locations for fishing.

Once we had agreed that another 10-month charter was the objective, we quickly got to the key issue – the price. They tabled an estimate of their expenses that were anticipated to increase compared to the period of the charter that had just been completed. In summary, they represented an increase of about 3 per cent. Out of respect for the excellent relationship I had with Hokoku, I stated that we had done very well out of currency fluctuations over the last year, and as they had borne the brunt of this, I was prepared to offer them an increase of more than 3 per cent. To my amazement, Mr Furuie responded that Hokoku Marine Products was a well-established business and they were used to the pros and cons of

currency fluctuations. There was no need to compensate them for the year. He looked at me and smiled: 'Next year, the currency will go our way'. It was obvious that the critical issue was that we continued to negotiate and to pay in US dollars. I found the contrast with what I would expect of an Australian company if offered more money surprising.

We managed to fill in two days with discussion of relatively minor issues, like things that might be done to improve the quality of the food on board. I remember saying that this was not a huge issue, but a bit more quality steak would be appreciated. This was duly noted. I advised that we greatly appreciated the efforts of the Japanese cook, Wakasaki-san, to prepare meals that our scientists would enjoy. The food on the boat had been predominantly Japanese and very good.

One issue of some substance to me was to enquire about the possibility that the captain of the vessel could be changed. The other scientists and I had some difficulties working with the current captain. On too many occasions, he had taken it upon himself to move the vessel while we were actually fishing a school. He was not a good fishing master, and we had not been able to convince him of the benefit of keeping a school biting for a long time compared to trying to catch the maximum weight of fish very quickly. For our tagging operations, a steady stream of fish coming into the tagging cradles was a great deal better than having 'helter skelter' fishing, resulting in a big pile of dead fish on the deck. We were using the vessel for research, not commercial fishing. In addition, the captain did not like to take instructions from the senior scientists who were in charge when I was not on the boat, and this was more than half of the time. One of those scientists, Bob Gillett, was even younger than I was. Even when I was on the vessel, the captain could be difficult.

Mr Furuie said that changing the captain of the boat was a very big thing to ask. They did not have a lot of experienced skippers, and he doubted that he would be able to find one who would be prepared to be away from home for 10 months straight. Plus, the current captain would consider it an insult to be replaced against his wishes. Mr Furuie said that first he would talk to the incumbent. I said that I would appreciate anything he could do to help. I had found the current captain to be rather stubborn, so I was not optimistic. But in keeping with Hokoku's willingness to help, when the *Hatsutori Maru* arrived back from its annual service in Japan, to commence the second cruise, it had a new skipper, captain Mirsutoyo Kaneda. He was to turn out to be excellent.

During the year since our first round of negotiations, I had made enquiries of several Japanese diplomats and scientists about the issue of 10 people taking me to lunch and/or dinner. The answer was a bit convoluted, but it provided a plausible explanation of the events.

Since shortly after the end of the Second World War, Japan had a policy of rewarding companies who could bring foreign currencies into Japan, particularly US dollars. This reward was in the form of not only tax deductions on legitimate expenses in attracting foreign investment, but actual reimbursement of all or at least part of those expenses. Entertainment expenses were considered legitimate, provided at least one of the people doing business in US dollars was present. The rules were rather complicated, and none of the people I managed to speak to was up with the details, but there were apparently grades of reimbursement that were influenced by the amount of US dollars involved. I was told by one person that $100,000 was a key trigger. At around $600,000 a year, we were well above the minimum level.

In my private discussions with Mr Furuie, he stated that his company was particularly pleased with the relationship we had developed and how smoothly the first year of our agreement had progressed. He also thanked me for agreeing to have numerous staff members accompany me at restaurants and other events. To demonstrate his appreciation, he wanted to ensure that I had the opportunity to experience, at their expense, some of the benefits of Japanese culture, such as excellent restaurants, bars and the opera.

Back to the meeting on Thursday. We had quite a few minor issues for which the discussion was valuable. One was the possibility that we could give the captain as much lead time as possible for our detailed schedule. They had some concerns about the availability of fuel and stores in some of the places that were on our draft itinerary, particularly the smaller countries or territories. I agreed that we would work with the captain on the detailed plan and that we would schedule a meeting on board the *Hatsutori Maru* every week to ensure we were 'on the same page'.

Mr Furuie's two senior officers took me to dinner on Thursday night. It was more than just dinner. Following a wonderful meal at another excellent French restaurant, which had several Michelin hats, we went to the opera. After that, we went to a very small bar in which there were only three very small tables and four or five stools at the bar. At one of the tables sat an elderly, extremely well-dressed man who was obviously somewhat intoxicated but still drinking, serving himself from the bottle of whiskey on

his table. I was having a very pleasant chat with my colleagues, mainly about the day's discussions, when the elderly gentleman fell off his chair. He lay flat on the floor. Two men in black suits and white gloves immediately appeared and carried him out to a very large black car that was parked at the curb right in front of the bar. The promptness and precision of their response left no doubt that they had been observing their master for some time and were well trained. My colleagues advised me that the gentleman in question was a very influential businessman, and he came to this bar most evenings after working late and just drank until the inevitable occurred, again. I had noticed throughout 'downtown' Tokyo a surprising, to me, number of similarly small bars with racks of whiskey bottles with writing on them – the names of their owners. My colleagues advised me that the practice of senior Japanese businessmen drinking in seclusion was reasonably common. It was accepted practice for those who could afford it. The fact that they had their 'minders' looking out for them meant that they would not be a cause of inconvenience to other patrons of the bar.

The third year of negotiations included several more lessons in Japanese culture.

The meeting began in excellent spirits. My wellbeing was heightened when Mr Furuie advised that they were proposing to upgrade the vessel I would be chartering from the *Hatsutori Maru No. 1* to the *Hatsutori Maru No. 5* (which was the same type of vessel but 50 tonnes bigger). It would be roomier for the scientists and more stable, and it was faster. Hokoku Marine Products would make this better vessel available at a little extra cost. Then they handed out the profile of the charter agreement. It included a very significant increase in the monthly charter cost; from memory, the increase was close to 30 per cent. I was surprised. Whatever the actual cost was, it took the total cost of a 10-month charter well above my budget. Unlike last year, I had very little money to negotiate with this time: I had spent almost all of my noncommitted cash on the purchase of a computer for more than $100,000 (see Chapter 15). There was also some uncertainty at this time over the actual level of contributions from a couple of donors, and uncertainty about when some of the contributions might be received.

I told them that I found the size of this requested increase in price to be unreasonable, and based on what they had told me and what was in their proposal, it was not well justified. I was deeply disappointed that they had not given me any warning that such an increase was coming. One of their

officers then proceeded to read out their proposal. He finished by adding that they believed this was a perfectly reasonable request. As soon as I said that I did not agree and thought it unreasonable, he picked the paper up and read it out again. When a third person read out the same proposal, I realised that our relationship had suddenly reverted to where we started two years ago, when they would not accept who I was. They had gone back to referring to me again as Dr Kearney. I needed some time to think.

I told them that I would like to take their proposal back to my hotel and think about it overnight. We had sorted most of the issues related to the vessel charter out in the negotiations of the previous two years, so really, the only issue this year was the price. We had plenty of time. Mr Furuie adjourned the meeting until 10 am the next day.

On arriving back at the hotel, I immediately called Mr Immamura. Fortunately, he answered. He offered to call Mr Furuie and get back to me. He did not take long. The issue was straightforward. My direct challenge to their proposal was not the Japanese way of doing business. The fact that I said they were being unreasonable was insulting. I had to find a much gentler way of asking them to reconsider. Mr Immamura was confident that if I could do that, we could make progress. Mr Furuie was ready to negotiate, but only if such negotiations were done in a spirit that was in keeping with Japanese culture. How much progress we might make, he was not sure.

The next morning, to open our discussions, I delivered the short speech I had composed overnight:

> Mr Furuie and gentlemen, I wish to apologise for some of the things I said yesterday and the way I said them. I am truly sorry. The reason I reacted the way I did was that I suddenly realised that the problem I had with your proposed increase in the price for the *Hatsutori Maru No. 5* was all my fault. The real problem is simply that I do not have enough money. I will not be able to charter the vessel for the 10-month period that has worked so well for two years. Your proposal is perfectly reasonable. The fault is mine. I was disappointed, and I overreacted. However, I must tell you that at this time, I only have enough money to charter the vessel for eight months at the price you have quoted.

Mr Furuie took his time, then he responded:

> Kearney-san, thank you for your apology. It is much appreciated. Our company is a very honourable and reasonable one, and we work in good cooperation with our partners and clients. We have very much enjoyed working with you and your research team over the past two years. We would like to keep doing it. We appreciate that you do not have enough money, so in the spirit of good cooperation we will accept the eight-month charter, and we will reduce the price to $70,000 per month.

I thanked him sincerely and said that I would speak to the donor governments and hopefully be able to extend the charter to at least nine months.

Harmony had been restored. We had very productive discussions of details through to lunchtime. Mr Furuie came up to me with a big smile on his face. He shook my hand and repeated how much he had enjoyed our relationship. And he enjoyed it so much that the next day he would like to take me to lunch at Tokyo's best restaurant – one that is Japanese, and the very best of Japanese culture of dining would be on display.

The lunch was indeed memorable. There were three of us, and we had our own rather large room with two full-time ladies in unpretentious kimonos as attendants. Part of the floor was glass, and very large carp could be seen swimming around below us. The meal was truly wonderful. I lost count of the number of small courses, but the total was about 18. All were impressive, but some were spectacular, like the southern bluefin tuna toro sashimi. Many of the courses were very small, one being a simple quail egg. But, as I was informed, it was no ordinary quail egg! I have forgotten the story about the egg, but I will never forget the one about the Ayu, a very small (about 10 centimetres) freshwater fish. We had one each that had been fried and presented on a small plate with no trimmings whatsoever. Mr Furuie explained: 'The Ayu is very popular in Japan. But this is no ordinary Ayu. This one comes from the freshwater streams on Mt Fuji'. I knew enough about the reverence associated with Mt Fuji to be most impressed, and said so. Mr Furuie continued: 'But Mt Fuji is not the reason this one is extra special; the real reason is that this species is on top of the Japanese endangered species list'. I really did not know what to say, so I said nothing but nodded in agreement. I later found, by enquiring of my Japanese colleagues, that these Ayu were almost certainly fish that were cultured from broodstock that had their origins in the streams of Mt Fuji.

The demise of the ones we ate would have no impact on the wellbeing of the species. But yes, the wild population is indeed threatened. The occasion was indeed enjoyable and memorable.

We concluded our meeting early, with a full day to spare.

I was sorry my trips to Japan to negotiate the charter agreement had come to an end. Collectively, they had represented a fabulous set of experiences. They had enabled me to overcome one of the most significant challenges to the whole of the Skipjack Programme – the procurement of an appropriate research vessel.

That evening, I was most pleased when Mr Immamura accepted my invitation to come to the Imperial Hotel for a glass of whiskey, or two, so that I could express my great appreciation in person.

Shortly after returning to Noumea, I was advised by the Government of France that they would be making a substantial increase in their contribution for the next year. The Government of Japan and the Japanese Fisheries Agency also agreed to increase their contributions to help with the increased charter costs. I was able to advise Mr Furuie that we could now extend our charter agreement to the usual full 10 months. His response: 'Thank you, Kearney-san. I am very pleased'.

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