

# Make the most of your chances

Atsuko Takamiya

SPECIAL TO THE JAPAN TIMES

How can I be an interpreter?

This is the most popular question I am asked when I have an opportunity to talk about my profession. Well, I am not exactly an interpreter because I'm not specially trained for that. What I do is more like a communicator who assists global business. Working freelance, my job largely depends on encounters and chances, and I've always tried to make the most out of them. Also, I had a good start.



Before I go on, I should mention that I have had very little experience staying overseas, and my English is far from ideal. Back in March 2002, when I left a computer company, I was unemployed and expecting a baby. For me, it meant plenty of free time and hope. So I studied for and, luckily, passed the national interpreter guide exam a month before my daughter's birth. In the spring of 2005, I started to work as an English-speaking tour guide.

At that time I lived in Kyushu. It is an adorable place, blessed with beautiful nature, fresh food, and the unique exotic mood influenced by neighboring Asian countries. I cannot describe how much I enjoyed the privilege to explore the fascinating island with tourists. Not only that, I learned that hospitality and physical strength were vital to my job, which I was not aware of when studying. Many things can

be learned from life.

In March 2009, I left Kyushu for Tokyo. Again, I was unemployed, but gradually I received chances and came to be involved more in corporate jobs. Being a top business city, Tokyo attracts millions of people from around the world. Among them are the ambitious executives who work globally. They need someone who can handle both English and Japanese, not only to translate, but to negotiate and even to create a good business mood. And I fit in there. Quite often people find what's good for you.

In time I came to have regular customers, largely due to the Internet. Using cell phones and other devices, people can be in contact in real time. Sometimes I get an offer via my smart phone and a couple of minutes later I confirm it. It sometimes happens that my customers introduce me to their friends or colleagues. Also, I acquire new customers through my website. With the Internet, business is getting more online, direct and challenging. Beneath it lies a good human relationship.

As my career developed, I started to have new opportunities. Last year, as a guest speaker, I lectured about inbound tourism at Rikkyo University, Utsunomiya University, Tokyo Keizai University and Keio University. I also made speeches at symposiums outside Tokyo. Then last month my corporate customer invited me to Germany, where I learned a lot by traveling abroad. Things can be extended in unpredictably wonderful ways, and there's always a chance for a start.