



Thanks, Hiro

by Dave McCaughan

Hiro is the best hire I have made in my 10 years in Japan. Japanese but mostly raised and educated in the West, he didn't seem to fit in either society completely, and yet he was able to bridge both. When I hired him, he had been working at hotels in Hawaii—perfect training for a strategist at an advertising agency.

One of the first tasks I gave him was to become the agency's eyes and ears on youth culture, which meant spending a lot of time in bars and clubs and getting to know some of the rising celebrities. As a 24-year-old single guy, he threw himself into his new role.

Hiro became one of our stars. Then he started to complain of sluggishness and he had trouble moving his limbs. We assumed it was his body reminding the former American School in Japan athlete and serious partyer that his 30th birthday was approaching.

But he felt progressively worse and eventually, after weeks of hospitals tests, he received the bad news: he had amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), or Lou Gehrig's disease, which gradually atrophies the muscles to paralysis while leaving cognition fully intact.

Hiro still comes to the office every Wednesday to work with my team. The rest of the week he works from home, using eye-tracking technology our company helped him obtain for his computer. He receives constant visitors, including musicians like Verbal and Hiroshi Fujiwara, who have been hugely supportive.

As the reality of his condition became clear, Hiro decided to fight the disease and help others fight, too. He started END ALS, an association that works to raise awareness about this terrible condition while seeking out government support for research and a change in the health policy to benefit all ALS sufferers.

Hiro's recently published book, in Japanese and English, 99% *Thank You: Things Even ALS Can't Take Away*, is a reflective, funny and inspiring story about his life and his desire for people to see ALS as something to fight.

There are even a couple of passages about funny tasks I set him at work, which says everything about my friend, colleague and mate. He never fails to look for the funny things in life, as he builds hope for the future. A lovely lesson for us all. Thanks, Hiro. □

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