

Intellectual property key to economic survival, success

It is seven years since Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi stated his intention to turn Japan into an intellectual property (IP) country. As the world's largest nonprofit, non-governmental organization, with almost 1,200 members, the Japan Intellectual Property Association (JIPA) continues to take the initiative in representing industries and users of the IP system in Japan while working closely with the government to consolidate the IP environment. The Japan Times recently had the opportunity to speak to Toichi Takenaka, the new chairman of the board of Astellas Pharma Inc. In the question-and-answer session, he revealed his opinions, and the JIPA's stance in pursuing success and growth in the future. The following is a summary of his remarks.

Japan Times: From an intellectual property point of view, what can industries do to survive the current economic crisis and take the next step forward?

Toichi Takenaka: A patent is meaningless unless it is used. It takes a long time from development to actual sales in any industry. Specifically, in terms of the pharmaceutical industry, medicinal products require around 15 years from patent application to approval. The economy is sure to change over such a long period. In an economic crisis, it is easy to decrease investment on research and development. However, as a consequence, we may face unfavorable sales in the future.

To break this negative chain reaction, industries must continuously work to build up their strength so that they are prepared for any future bumps in the economic road. They must take strategic IP action and look five



Toichi Takenaka

years down that road.

Corporations must be globalized to maximize their return on new discoveries, inventions and innovations. If we seriously think about future survival and prosperity, there is no other choice but to take such definite IP action.

Japan Times: Who are the main players in such moves?

Takenaka: Definitely people. Global activity requires global staff. Coupled with such understanding, management support becomes vital. A corporate brand itself won't sell. It has to be backed by IP. Companies that have either raked in huge profits or suffered massive losses from IP are acutely aware of these realities and are keen on developing their personnel, from the top management down.

Japan Times: What is the JIPA doing in this regard?

Takenaka: It offers personnel training to members on its own, but also uses about 200 lecturers from companies, patent attorneys, lawyers, officials of the Japan Patent Office of the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, university professors, and so on. Every year, around 17,000 trainees attend the lectures, which consist of 95 courses, from introductory courses to IP expert training courses.

Japan Times: How do you evaluate the role and function of universities?

Takenaka: Universities are of vital importance. They teach about IP and how to protect it. Their importance will definitely increase in the future as centers for basic research. In that context, the functions of their respective IP departments must be reinforced, allowing their applied patents to be used more effectively and actively. Concurrently, more researchers, professors and staff members must be nurtured. This is because I firmly believe in the "excellence of intelligence."

Japan Times: But with the dwindling number of children and rapidly aging population, securing and developing excellent human resources is likely to become a more difficult task in Japan.

Takenaka: That whole issue is deeply related to how serious society and industry is about fostering human resources: What they are doing with their "already available hands," so to speak.

IP binds science with technology. Some researchers become interested in IP through their daily work. When this happens, it is imperative that the employers support staff members seeking to advance their studies and become qualified as patent attorneys.

I especially think more women should be encouraged to make such a move. Being a patent attorney is an ideal career for women, who have to go through various stages in their lives. If they have such a qualification, they can work from home when they are bringing up children or even when their husbands are transferred to different business locations.

Japan Times: What about the JIPA's global activities?

Takenaka: The JIPA is careful to promote international harmonization by consolidating various rules and process-

es on a global scale. One recent example is the global consolidation of the patent application document in 2008. Use of the same format in different countries has helped to slash application costs. It also has reduced the amount of time needed for making a patent submission, regardless of where you are. Now we are discussing the creation of a "one search" system, which provides the same search results by sharing search strategies and database, with the American Intellectual Property Law Association and Intellectual Property Owners Association of the United States, and BusinessEurope.

The JIPA maintains close relationships with organizations and government ministries in the United States and Europe through personnel exchange and seminars. Furthermore, it respects the promising developments in Southeast Asia, and dispatches study groups to India and South Korea to investigate and discuss the drawbacks of protectionist movements, for example.

In such ways, we offer related institutions around the world well-timed, suitable opinions for improving and using their respective IP systems.

Japan Times: Finally, are there any elements that you think are key to future success?

Takenaka: On a national level, Japan must continue making superb-quality goods to sell globally. To do so, IP is a must. From a corporate standpoint, the triangular balance of IP, R & D and management becomes vital. IP and R & D can be regarded as the two driving wheels. They provide the momentum. The third wheel, which balances the action of this drive is wise, farsighted management. (M.Y.)