



The second generation
Tomijiro Kobayashi

Chapter 1

Next initiatives after charity coupons: The second stage of social contributions

Activities to promote oral health begin

Lion's activities to promote oral health, mainly initiated by Tomijiro Jr., continue to realize the vision of the company's founder. To know how this unprecedented commitment by business to contribute to society began, consider that era in Japan.



A toothpick with brush-shaped tip for cleaning teeth.



Major dietary changes required better oral hygiene

From toothpicks to toothbrushes

From ancient times in Japan, it was customary for people to clean their teeth with toothpicks, etc. Educational books from the 1700s note that, "If you clean your teeth, you will not lose any, even when you are old." However, after 1854 when Japan's long era of seclusion ended, western culture quickly entered the country, causing big changes in the Japanese diet. Dining tables that had in the past typically held cold, hard foods, were now lined with warm, soft, sweet foods. The number of people suffering from dental cavities increased rapidly.

The first people to take remedial action were dentists who had studied western medicine. One person translated and published an American pamphlet on oral hygiene, and another went to schools to provide instruction on how to prevent dental cavities. However, since dentists then did not enjoy the social status that dentists enjoy today, they were unable to exert significant influence regarding dental hygiene. In the 1890s after Tomijiro Kobayashi & Co. was established, the use of toothbrushes and tooth powder increasingly replaced use of toothpicks, but knowledge of oral hygiene was poor, and each person had his or her own method of brushing, because no one in government, public administration or elsewhere was working systematically to disseminate information about oral hygiene.



The First Lion Lecture Meeting, 1913, at Tokyo YMCA Hall

Everything started from a lecture

The first Lion Lecture Meeting is held

Tomijiro Kobayashi & Co.'s promotion of oral hygiene awareness at the bequest of the late founder began with lectures for loyal users of Lion Dentifrice and distribution of pamphlets explaining toothbrushing methods. However, the initial results were limited and the lectures seemed to be less effective than the charity coupons on bags of tooth powder had been. How could the company communicate the importance of oral hygiene to more people? The company's commitment to community service and raising awareness gave rise to Lion Lecture Meetings with prominent people discussing public concerns, as well as lectures on oral hygiene. However, very few private companies at that time presented such lectures, so some potential attendees warily expected the meetings to be bothersome sales events, and concern emerged as to whether enough people would attend lectures about oral hygiene, a subject that people were generally unaware of. Nonetheless, Tomijiro Jr. pushed forward in the belief that "Raising awareness of oral hygiene will lead to better health, especially among children who will lead the next generation."

* In 1908, the company name was changed from Tomijiro Kobayashi & Co. to Kobayashi Co., Ltd.

Sosaku Midorikawa was a full-time lecturer for Lion Lecture Meetings. In those days, few experts provided instruction about oral hygiene, but Mr. Midorikawa, who had been teaching that subject at an elementary school, found a kindred spirit in Tomijiro Jr.



Meetings held in China and Taiwan

The lecture meetings were managed by Sosaku Midorikawa, who had left his dental practice to join Kobayashi, and Tanefumi Inoue, the Lion Lecture director. To increase attendance, they created a program including features such as music. The long-awaited first Lion Lecture Meeting successfully left an impact on the audience that exceeded expectations. This boosted confidence in the lecture series that totaled 175 lecture meetings nationwide in its first year. Presentation was enhanced at the lectures with photos and other documentation. Initially held at public halls and other urban venues for the general public, the meetings spread throughout elementary, junior high, and various secondary schools, youth leagues, the military, factories, and even overseas to Sakhalin, Taiwan, Korea, and as far as Manchuria. As Mr. Midorikawa said, "When you toss a pebble into a still pond, the impact on the water is small, but expands widely. I want to be that pebble."

A total of 109,078 Lion Lecture Meetings promoting oral hygiene were attended by 57,710,000 people over about 20 years, until 1933, greatly contributing to public health.

Oral health promotion by the Dental Association

Thanks to Tomijiro Jr., activities began to take full effect

In addition to Kobayashi, The Japan United Dental Association (now the Japan Dental Association), a nationwide organization of dentists, was also eager to promote oral hygiene awareness. In the same year as the first Lion Lecture Meeting, the Association released and widely distributed a "Tooth Health" booklet through dentists across Japan to students at junior high schools and girls' high schools, teachers at elementary schools, etc., but budget limitations prevented the group from sufficiently scaling up its activities. Consequently, Tomijiro Jr. donated 3000 yen (equivalent to about 60 million yen today) per year to the organization, which used it to start full-scale production of samples, models, charts, movies, etc. to spread knowledge about oral hygiene, and hold expositions and meetings on the subject throughout Japan.

The large donation amounted to more than twice the Association's previous yearly budget, as Tomijiro Jr. felt that dentists were critical for spreading awareness about oral hygiene throughout Japan. He continued to make yearly donations to support the Association's oral health promotion activities. Over seven years, the company's contributions to the Association totaled around 10,000 yen (equivalent to about 200 million yen currently).

The passion to serve society is passed on to the next generation.

Nowadays, companies regularly contribute to society, but 100 years ago such activities were very rare in Japan. A portion of the purchase price of Lion Dentifrice with charity coupon went to charity, but the Lion Lecture Meetings were free for attendees, as all costs were covered by Kobayashi. The burden of Tomijiro's donations to the Dental Association and related costs was significant but worthwhile for advancing the founder's aspirations to share a passion for working to improve the human condition.
