

Dinner in Tokyo

Norman & Noriko

After 2 Years of being away from Japan I was able to secure a visa to enter this amazing country and I once again touchdown in Tokyo.



One of the first things I wanted to do was reconnect with Norman Bodek's wife Noriko san and reminisce about the



past and all the wonderful times we had to together.

Over dinner, Noriko san asked me why I was doing the Japan Study Missions?

Many of you don't know this but Norman asked me to go with him to Japan about five years ago.



I learned a lot on that trip and Norman and I became very close friends. Since then I traveled with Norman in Japan, India, and parts of the



Caribbean, meeting amazing people and touring wonderful factories.

During that first trip, Norman told me that he had done over 50 Japan study

missions. Needless to say Norman inspired me and today I've lead almost 40 JSM. Now, with Norman's passing about a year and a half ago, I'm trying to keep Norman's amazing flame and vision alive.

Norman understood more keenly than anyone, what was going on in Japan and why it was so special. I first came to Japan to learn the Toyota



Production System 20 years ago, but Norman taught me it was not about the Toyota Production System. The essence of what we needed to learn was understanding Japan. If you could

understand Japan you had a much better chance of understanding the Toyota Production System. From that moment on, I switched my learning hat to an entirely different mode.

Norman and I had a father-son relationship. We would argue about many things and agree about many things, but one thing was for sure, I learned a lot from him.

Back in the 70s and 80s when Norman first came to Japan, he understood what was going when nobody else had a clue. He began the translations of Shingo's and Ohno's books and started

promoting and distributing them back to America. He was a real visionary.





He was regarded as the father of lean in the United States and he was the one that planted the first seed that made it possible for you and I to be exposed to this wonderful way of thinking.

Norman was quirky and smart and best of all he was willing to put it all out on the line. He said what he thought and asked the questions that

most other were not willing to ask. The best question he ever asked me was, “what is Japan all about” to which I didn’t have the answer. I have since learned the answer, and from that moment on I never looked at Japan the same way.

The morning after my dinner with Noriko san, she asked me to type the answer that I gave her over dinner on why I’m doing the Japan study Mission, this was my answer to her.

My purpose is to help people become extraordinary leaders!

Why is that important?

- History shows us that whenever there is extraordinary leadership societies flourish and people’s lives improve.
- Conversely history is replete with examples of poor leadership and the destruction that it causes.

- I am personally filled with happiness when I see people succeed because of great leadership.



- Japan is a great place to witness thoughtfulness and extraordinary leadership. It is not perfect, but it is better than anywhere else I've ever seen. When I come to Japan I'm looking for all the golden nuggets so that I can



continue to build other people up.

- Norman was a big part of creating the desire to find the golden nugget, because he was always looking, too!



Noriko san this is what I learned!

- One thing I learned last night from our dinner together was when you told me why Japanese people are such good learners..... They are well-versed in the basics—reading, writing, and arithmetic.

These basic fundamentals of learning are essential to developing good habits of learning as well as a good philosophy of life. So when you have the fundamentals down you have the building blocks to both learn effectively and thus improve effectively.

Noriko then sent me this quote “The relationship between math and philosophy may not be obvious at first, but on closer inspection, the intersection is rich: **the language of logic, set theory and the very concept of numbers are central to both disciplines**”

I can't help but conclude that the Japanese emphasis on the basics of reading, writing and arithmetic support their deep philosophy about living a quality life. When I asked my dear friend Tadahiro why the Japanese



changed so quickly during the Meiji restoration he said, “because the Japanese are quick learners.” It makes me think I

should've listened to my mother a little more carefully when she told me do my homework!



It is irrefutable that I’ve learned a lot from Noriko san and Norman. The most important thing is that there are golden nuggets right in front of all of us, but so often we meander through life and rarely recognize them. The



most interesting thing is Norman passed on at age 88 and he was still like a child—always asking questions, he always had a grin across his face, and he was curious about learning until the last minute.

There are a few things that Norman and I argued about and a few things that I was fortunate enough to have time to encourage Norman to do.

Norman would always tell me he was only going to live to about 82. I got so sick of hearing that, I said, “Norman stop saying that nonsense. Take care of yourself and you’ve got a lot of good years ahead of you.” I’m happy to say he got another six years, and every year he got beyond 82 I made him eat crow and tell me that he was wrong and I was right. Norman completed his book ‘A Miraculous Life’ and I got him to come up to Bellingham where I paid for him to get it recorded



professionally in his own voice. Norman’s voice and book is now on my app. Norman is with us not only in his fabulous teachings, but we have his voice and his passion for all of us to enjoy and learn from.

When I visited their house in Japan, I saw that he had his desk off to the side, I told him, “Norman you need to immediately pull that desk right out in the middle of the room, in front of a big plate glass

window looking over the yard.”

Last night Noriko san showed me a picture of how Norman had his office and desk exactly as it should’ve been and Noriko said he enjoyed it so much more.



As I worked on this document to capture my thoughts and everything I learned from Norman and Noriko, Noriko sent me this message.

Attached below is Norman's memo to himself that I found this morning while I was searching for something else.

I thought you might like it as it was very similar to your purpose of doing JSM.



"My goal is to continue to discover the world's greatest management's wisdom to help people live better lives. I want to help leaders to develop themselves to manage socially responsible

organizations. I want people to love coming to work and make their companies a great place to be.”

It was dated 11/25/2020, 2 weeks before his passing!

Best regards,
Noriko

So as all of you get ready to come on the 2SL Japan Experience this is my charge!

Pull your desk out in the middle of the room and open your eyes!

Lastly, what a waste it would be if all the work that Norman and Noriko san had done teaching people in Japan about this amazing culture was lost? So without a doubt I'm making sure there is

no waste!

