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Field Notes from Abroad: Person to Person

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Person to Person in Japan

Alexandra Dickey
Linfield College, adickey@linfield.edu

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Field Notes from Abroad: Person to Person in Japan

One of my Japanese friends is now working in a large banking corporation in Japan. He has offered me a lot of interesting points about professional life in Japan and what it is like to work in a Japanese company. Japanese culture and society are very different from American, so professional life in Japan is also very different from American. However, I think my friend and I are very similar, despite growing up in such different environments.

I was really surprised by his dedication to his career. Since it's his first year in the company, he still needs to learn the company policies and work hard to satisfy his superiors. As a first-year employee, he often needs to arrive to work earlier than those who have been in the company longer. He lives in a company dormitory which enforces a curfew, so he is nearly always surrounded by his co-workers. He has to be careful of his behavior whenever he can be identified as a bank employee, as he is a representative of that company. Money is a sensitive issue, so if a bank employee is seen as irresponsible, it is a bad representation of the company. My friend enjoys the weekend when he no longer has to wear a suit, but I was surprised to find that he really doesn't mind the strain and the pressure of his job too much. He says it's difficult the first year, but it gets better later. He just needs to work hard and become accustomed to how the company is run. I think that if I were in his shoes, I'd feel too stifled, but I'm glad he is able to work well in his situation.

My friend and I both value hard work, professionalism, and loyalty when it comes to working in a company, but I think that we approach these values a little differently. My friend does often wish his company weren't so strict, but he says that's simply the way it is and it can't be helped. This system reminds me very strongly of my days in my high school's marching band. The freshmen members were new, and while some may be

skilled, they were inexperienced, and thus had to work harder to learn how things worked. The sophomores were more familiar with the operations, but still had to work hard to integrate into the greater machine that was the band. Juniors and seniors were there to help train the underclassmen, and among the upperclassmen were section leaders and drum majors who were given authority from the band director. Seniors were often given special privileges, like taking the nicest bus on band trips and being allowed to cut in line for uniforms. Freshmen did have a tough time starting out, but they knew that if they worked hard and obeyed those with authority, it would one day be them on the top. There's no way that the entire band could function without a hierarchy; one band director simply could not control 150 students, so power was delegated and control was maintained through sections. Marching band is complicated, and so is a banking company, so I think I can understand the logic behind the Japanese professional system.

Previously, I thought that I would like to work in a Japanese company, but I think that maybe I don't want to anymore. I'm sure that each company is different, but I'm not sure I could handle the stress from the amount of commitment that would be required of me. I really admire those people who can work such long hours, and even live in company property, but I've decided that it's just not for me. I'm glad that I was able to make friends with someone currently working professionally in Japan, as I was able to gain some insight into his life. Had I not gone to Japan and tried to make friends with Japanese people, I never would have known. In comparison, I think that perhaps a comparable job in America would perhaps be less stressful, although I suspect that wages may be lower. I'm sure it varies quite widely, though, so I will remember to keep my options open.