



慶應義塾大学ビジネス・スクール

Citizen Heiwa Watch Co., Ltd. (C)

The Meister System was introduced in 2003 after President Unno assumed office. The Watch Department started out with just five Meisters (one A-class Meister and four B-class Meisters). Today it has a total of 13 certified Meisters, all women, including one Super Meister, four A-class Meisters, and eight B-class Meisters. Throughout Citizen Heiwa Watch, there are a total of 26 certified Meisters: 13 watch assembly Meisters, three parts processing Meisters (three B-class), five printer assembly Meisters (four A-class and one B-class), four engineering Meisters (four B-class), and one administration (section staff) Meister (B-class). In the Watch Department, the Super Meister is responsible for skills management, human resources cultivation, and the assembly of Citizen's S-class products. A-class Meisters take charge of the one-man assembly of movements as well as cases for finished products, technology and skill training, and the assembly of Citizen's S-class products. B-class Meisters carry out the one-man assembly of movements or finished products, technology and skill training, and the assembly of Citizen's A-class products. All three levels of Meisters can be appointed as watch assembly instructors in the company or for outside courses.

Ms. Etsuko Hashiba, the only Super Meister of watch assembly currently in the company, recalls the following about the early days after the introduction of the Meister System:

"I did not volunteer to become a Meister. Five workers were experimentally chosen and certified as Meisters. The company explained that they chose us as a result of a review of our past performance as it related to technology and skills and following discussion among the section managers and President. We were told that our mission was to foster human resources capable of the one-man assembly of watches. At the time, I felt honestly confused, wondering, 'What is a Meister? What am I supposed to do?' In the workplace, Meisters were distinguished from other general workers by wearing pink caps (general workers wore white ones). Because Meisters could

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be identified at a glance, other workers, especially male workers, gave us jealous looks, which was a terrible pressure. It was a workplace of fellow countrypersons, so even female workers looked at us as if they were saying ‘Why her?’ I thought that I, as a Meister, had to do something different from what I had been so I began to study hard even though I was already over 50 years old. As a result, I became the first woman in Nagano Prefecture to be certified as a second-grade watch/clock repairer.”

Ms. Michiko Fukuzawa, an A-class Meister, recalled her own experience of change after becoming a Meister:

“Since becoming a Meister, I often think about my work, not only during working hours but also on other occasions. I felt a sense of responsibility for my work arise in myself. This is a feeling I never had before I became a Meister.”

Super Meister Hashiba told of the difficulties she faced after she became a Meister:

“Because I am positioned at the top in the watch assembly section, I have no one in the company to discuss the anxiety and troubles I face in my work so I ask my husband and daughter for their advice at home. Most of my work requires concentration, so I always pay close attention to my health. As I try to keep regular hours every day, I have never caught a cold. There is a graph showing the actual numbers of assembled watches, which always makes me feel the strain and never allows me to feel relaxed. Meisters are supposed to assemble 50 watches per eight-hour workday so I get exhausted every day. At home, to rest my eyes, I only listen to TV, I do not watch it. It is sometimes tough to have little follow-up or words of appreciation from managers; maybe that is because they think Meisters can naturally do everything. I sometimes wish that my supervisors would take better care of Meisters or listen to our suffering.”

As regards what she thinks is good about being a Meister or what is rewarding in a Meister’s work, Super Meister Hashiba said the following:

“Above all, it is my greatest pleasure to be able to assemble watches all by myself. It is also a joy to actually feel that I can help customers to be happy by producing watches that they gladly use. Another charm of the Meister’s job is that, through the training of younger workers and by watching the progress of their skill improvement, I can enjoy their growth alongside them. Recently, I have taken charge of new-employees training. In our case, however, we have rarely experienced being trained by senior workers; we worked things out by ourselves and strived to steal the techniques of senior workers. Meisters are also responsible for the training of new employees and foreign workers. In this job I noticed that young workers of these days tend to think that it is only proper for them to be taught everything. To me, this attitude suggests a lack of eagerness to learn by oneself, which is greatly disappointing. It is not worth teaching somebody who has no will to learn by him-/herself. That’s why I have no intention of preparing any kind of manual in writing on what I have learned. Systems like the Meister System are important, but not entirely sufficient, to hand down our skills.”

A-class Meister Hiroko Arai continued:

“To be certified as a Meister, it is not enough to have skills and pass examinations—it is also necessary to be capable of teaching others. Qualifications are not the only criteria to become a Meister. Meisters are responsible for leading training courses outside of the company, including the watch/clock repair seminars held in Matsumoto, watch/clock repair training given to retailers, and activities to support local facilities for mentally disabled persons. At the same time, for the education of local youth, we are taking initiatives to actively accept the requests of workplace experience classes for students, so that we can show them the charm of manufacturing. The number of visitors to our factories was around 80 in fiscal 2003 and 2004. It rose to 214 in fiscal 2005 and to 451 in fiscal 2006. We would like to continue such activities in the future. It is also true that your workload increases significantly after being certified as a Meister. Actually, there is a Meister whose job is limited to human resources cultivation.”

As regards the training of foreign workers in a diversified work environment, A-class Meister Fukuzawa said:

“Since the assembly of watches requires a good sense of vision, we have been teaching workers who do not understand Japanese by drawing pictures and using illustrations. This method works to a certain extent when teaching operations. When a worker has a Japanese spouse, we often appoint his/her spouse as the leader of a group so that we can give instructions indirectly through his/her spouse.”

At Citizen Heiwa Watch, original tools are being developed in-house and the mechanization of manual operations is promoted for certain assembly processes. Ms. Hashiba spoke of the roles of Meisters in such circumstances:

“When assembly operations are mechanized by simple tools developed in-house, the production engineering staff who produce the tools observe the work of us Meisters and make inquiries regarding the points of assembly skills and things to pay attention to. In this context, the skills of Meisters assist in the development of tools and the mechanization of operations. However, in many cases, such observations or inquiries are not prescribed in the formal procedures of the company. Sometimes we are asked to give our comments after a prototype of a tool has already been produced or we are asked to point out the defects of a completed tool after we have begun using it. In addition, it is still difficult to give feedback on our skills to the headquarters of Citizen Watch so that they can design watches that are easy to assemble.”

Super Meister Hashiba added her opinion regarding the possibility of success in the further mechanization of the assembly process of high-class watches:

“Decorative watches such as our Campanola series require nine hands to be combined and assembled in a complicated form. Given that no error in assembly is allowed, I think that it would be next to impossible to mechanize the assembly process. As long as certain parts are purchased

from outside vendors, we cannot avoid accepting a certain amount of tolerance. However, even minute tolerance can stop machinery. Moreover, the size of the same hand can change slightly each day, depending on the workplace environment on that production day, such as temperature and humidity. Therefore, machinery with uniform movement will never be able to assemble high-class watches perfectly. For example, calibers have unique peculiarities created by each production lot, so we always make adjustments to each assembled watch, figuring out what kind of peculiarity its caliber has. Moreover, when Meisters put pressure on the parts to assemble them, we can feel the very subtle tightness and then adjust the pressure. This is the ability and skill that only Meisters have; it cannot be replaced by machinery. I believe that one can catch the subtleness of each hand only through manual assembly.”

A-class Meister Fukuzawa added the following:

“Once, the comment was made that our operation efficiency would increase if our workbenches were inclined. However, the moment that they were inclined even slightly, the watch hands were pulled out of their proper position by 0.x mm due to gravity and we could not continue our work. Our work involves such fine sensibility that it would be difficult to simply mechanize it.”

A-class Meister Hiroko Arai continued:

“Let’s think about how we could directly connect Meisters’ skills to our business. We could raise the added value of our watches by assembling them in front of customers’ eyes: the case back could be placed and the watch completed right in front of you, the names of both you and the Meister could be marked on the watch, and then you’d have a highly unique watch in your hand. Currently, even though they are multiskilled, Meisters take charge of only part of the assembly process such as that for the movement assembly, case assembly, and repair, in order to achieve operation efficiency. However, to realize the ‘custom-made-for-you’ style described above, the production style of Meisters would have to be altered to that of integral production by each Meister. Movements as well should be produced one by one if possible. It would also be necessary to equip the Atelier with deluxe private rooms so that our watches would have designs and a strong brand that is competitive against Swiss watches. Our current Atelier is located in the middle of other work areas with no partitions so the assembly process of high-class watches includes dust-removing work. I wish that I could manually assemble high-class brand watches in a clean work environment, in a private atelier in which the temperature and humidity were conditioned to be constant. Fortunately, as the Meister System of our company has gained public awareness over the past few years, I think that the idea I spoke of is a sure way to spread our brand. Actually, I have heard that this business possibility is already being discussed in the company.”

Reflecting upon President Unno after the introduction of the Meister System, Super Meister Hashiba summarized her opinion as follows:

“The presidents were people who lived in a different world; I had never spoken with them before. However, President Unno kindly and actively talks to us employees, so we speak with him frankly.

Frank communication with him also makes us feel that he cares about us, which raises our motivation naturally. As he gives us various messages on various occasions such as our New Year greetings, they convey his attitude toward the bettering of our company and I feel that the atmosphere in the company has improved. When I talk with visitors who have retired from this company, they often say, 'Citizen Heiwa Watch has become a good company' and I am so happy to hear such comments. It is the President's sense of mission and spirit that drives many measures to work. I feel this strongly these days."

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