

Foreword

Old Man's Holiday

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When we declare to ourselves “I’m going to do such-and-such on my next holiday!!”, we usually cannot help but get rather excited and expectant for some days before that holiday. If it is a trip, we would wonder where to go, expect local specialty foods, imagine what the hotel would be like, plan this and plan that, and our imaginations never ends. As we look back later after the trip, such time for “expectant imagination” is actually more fun than the trip itself. It is a plain fact that when we take our time for preparation, the trip would be more fun and stay in our memory longer. On the other hand, when we are not well prepared, minor unexpected happenings would be all right if we can just laugh about it, but if the worst comes to the worst, we might have to abandon the entire trip.

Ever since enforcement of Tier 1 emissions regulations in 1996, we engine engineers have made developments to comply with the subsequent emissions regulations for as long as 20 years.

Tier 1 regulation demanded the level which we could achieve by retarding the injection timing while slightly sacrificing fuel efficiency, but the regulation levels became more stringent as Tier 2, Tier 3, and Tier 4 regulations were enforced. Our technologies advanced accordingly with EGR, KVTG, KDPF and KSCR to satisfy the new levels and the control technology has become more and more complicated. Development work to comply with regulations cannot wait whether we like it or not. We simply had to make development frantically and go blindly along the rail. We needed to master new technologies, integrate them into our products and create new test standards and technical standards to comply with the regulation levels renewed every few years, but what was demanded to us most of all was the speed of development.

On the other hand, in view of planning, it has been, in a sense, “automatic”. The schedule and quality target were set more or less automatically, and limits in the technical level and development resource determine the technologies to be integrated as a matter of course. They decided the cost up to a certain degree. Essentially, quality targets and such are to be decided by ourselves by analyzing our strengths and weaknesses, enhancing strengths and improving weaknesses so that we can tell “we will do this” or “it must be this way”. However, in those days when most of them were decided automatically, we did not need to plan a strategy or draw a long-term vision very much, and we had little pleasure of imagining “this and that” as in the example of the eve of a trip in the beginning of this foreword.

Now that the development work to comply with Tier 4 emissions regulations has completed, efforts not only by engine engineers but also by the development division staff have come to an end of a phase, and the “era of doing what we want” is about to come. The air is filled with the excitement similar to “I’m going to do such-and-such on my next holiday!!”. Unexpected events could be fun, but as I have said earlier, good, solid preparation (planning) will bring about better results later and it will also give us the pleasure of wondering what to do. I think it is time to take a breath on the road we had been frantically running on, review what had happened and consider the future of Komatsu. In the fields of development and product planning, we must now thoroughly review the present conditions of our products, understand our strengths and weaknesses, imagine the future in the coming 20 to 30 years and draw a solid product strategy. It will be the people who joined Komatsu in the past 20 years of devotion to emission regulation compliances that will support Komatsu in those years to come, and it will be the first experience for them to draw the future image of Komatsu products. Different “brains” from those for executing development will be required. What we have to do now is to integrate the talents, creativity and flexibility of the young who will support Komatsu in 20 to 30 years from now with the wisdoms and experiences of the senior experts, and create the future vision.

The veterans need to lead the young as a matter of course, but it must not be intrusive. I believe we must form visions or plans that will give confidence to the young when they become the core and bear the responsibilities to the company. The young engineers need to be aware that “someday, we will become the Leaders!”. The more seriously we think, the more conflicts we will face, but it is only when we experience the “throes of creation”, we could create something worthwhile. I hope we will enjoy “thinking” which we have not had much chance to do.

“The first hour of the morning is the rudder of the day”. The coming year or two is critical. Never have an ordinary “old man’s holiday” which had been so exciting by expecting “I’m going to do such-and-such on my next holiday!!” but ends up idly without fulfilling the promise to himself.