

OPINION

Times Are a Changin'

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I learnt two things about Japan as I grew up in a country town in Australia. The Japanese worked for one company for life and they had trouble saying, "no".

Attitudes have changed dramatically in Japan over the past few decades and my perceptions as a young student Down Under of this are now way off the mark. Many candidates we meet have worked for several companies and there is a growing list of candidates who now say 'no' to job offers.

"The times are a changing," wrote Bob Dylan, and they always do. The cherry blossom tree in front of our office in Akasaka has undergone marvelous transformation recently, Al Gore tells us that the climate has already changed, and the Japanese pharmaceutical industry has undergone major upheaval over the past five years.

I am meeting disgruntled Pfizer and Banyu employees, all wondering what has happened to their companies, and I am seeing other very qualified people take redundancy packages and seek companies with stronger pipelines. Employees at Serono and E Merck wonder if their company will have a stronger presence in Japan. Certainly one thing is true for all of us, our lives will be different in six to 12 months. To what degree, we just don't know.

Information is an important factor to help us cope with change and we provide information to thousands of candidates within the pharmaceutical industry seeking advancement.

The 50-year-old toxicology director we met recently will most probably end up in a head office somewhere in Tokyo. When the senior director came to us, he was not aware of the big picture and where he fitted into the scheme of things. Now he has a

clear understanding about executive positions and start-up companies. He is actually looking forward to the challenge because he now understands there are many opportunities.

It is easy to focus on the mergers and acquisitions and turmoil within the industry. As one Tanabe executive explained: "I'm a bit worried about the future for Tanabe's pipeline and the reduction of NHI price. We're now consolidating with Mitsubishi, and I have mixed feelings about the future".

Another candidate, an anti-infective product manager from Pfizer, felt the same uncertain way and feared for her future. But she was unaware of her strong position. We informed her that her fluent English and a strong marketing record put her in high demand. She is now embracing the future.

Information is power and information can be comforting. Today's job market is fluid, and despite the changes, there are more opportunities than ever before.

GlaxoSmithKline, Eli Lilly, Novo Nordisk and Wyeth are companies with strong pipelines and growing businesses. There are many start-up companies such as Shogoo, Symbio and Intergrated Development Associates that are providing new avenues for drugs to be developed. Clinical Research Organizations too are growing and are now an integral part of the Japanese pharmaceutical landscape.

It was the famous Irish playwright, George Bernard Shaw who wrote, "Progress is impossible without change, and those who cannot change their minds cannot change anything." Times are changing and we must open our minds to new opportunities.

The mind is like a parachute and only works when it is open.