

By T.D. Christensen

WORK/LIFE BALANCE

AN ESSENTIAL INGREDIENT IN HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT EXPERT'S SUCCESS

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A

s Riki Takeuchi talks about his career and his research, he glances at the clock. In 30 minutes, he needs to be at the UT Dallas Activity Center to teach a brand new taekwondo class for Jindal PhD students.

"I'm a firm believer that in order to be creative and productive, you have to have a healthy mind and body," says Takeuchi, a faculty member in the Organizations, Strategy and International Management Area and the Jindal School of Management Advisory Council Distinguished Professor. He also happens to be a third-degree black belt.

"Most management literature doesn't talk about it, but physical health is critical in being resilient, productive and disciplined," he says.

Finding new ways to inspire employees and organizations to perform at the highest level is a major theme in Takeuchi's research. But he admits he did not start hitting his own career goals until he went through plenty of trial and error and learned some key lessons from his late father.

A native of Tokyo, Takeuchi moved to the U.S. for two years as a teen when his father,



(From left) UT Dallas President Richard C. Benson, JSOM PhD student Dorian Boncoeur, Jindal School of Management Advisory Council Distinguished Professor Riki Takeuchi and Jindal School Dean and Caruth Chair Hasan Pirkul at the investiture ceremony in April, during which Takeuchi's endowed position was formally bestowed.

Kazuo Takeuchi, worked as a visiting professor of human resource management at North Carolina State University. While attending high school in Japan, the younger Takeuchi realized he had not gotten the best education possible. So instead of going to a Japanese university after graduation, he enrolled at North Carolina State, "which was the best choice I ever made," he says.

He flourished at North Carolina State, yet Takeuchi still struggled to find his career path. He moved back to Japan to be closer to his girlfriend at the time, and spent three years trading stocks and bonds for a Japanese securities company.

It was a dead-end job, with little chance for advancement. But it taught him valuable lessons about seeking out jobs that do not kill

Riki Takeuchi



creativity or quash employee aspirations, he said.

"Everything at that job was decided by the higher-ups, and that's the part I didn't like — somebody telling me what to do, when to do it, and how to do it," he says. "I realized this isn't the job for me."

Takeuchi returned to the U.S. and earned a master's degree at Purdue University and a PhD at the University of Maryland. In 2004, he landed a job as a professor at the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, where he began researching cutting-edge ways to get employees to do their best work.

In both his research and in his own career, Takeuchi followed the footsteps of his father and found inspiration in the elastic nature of academia.

"My father was a good role model: He knew that [being a professor] requires working long hours, and it takes a lot of initiative, but it's also flexible and autonomous and rewarding in the sense that he didn't have to go to school every day — he could play tennis with my family on some weekdays," Takeuchi says.

Similarly, Takeuchi thrives on having a flexible work/life balance in which he can easily carve out time for exercise and to be with his wife — who he met in Hong Kong — and their 5-year-old daughter and 3-year-old son. "I get to spend more time with my family, which is one of the best aspects of being in this profession," he says.

As a researcher, Takeuchi has delved deep into topics like employee creativity, aspiration performance, performance change patterns, and strategic human-resource management. His research has appeared in noted publica-

tions including *Journal of Applied Psychology* and *Academy of Management Journal*.

Last year, *Personal Psychology* published a paper he co-authored on cross-cultural adjustment — a key subject as the global village continues to shrink and employees increasingly work with colleagues who look, speak and act differently than they do.

"In our research, we found out that you *can* transcend cultural boundaries, but it all depends on your attitude," he says. "People who have a fixed belief that culture can't be permeated are the ones who do not adjust well when they are on an international exchange."

Traits like having an open mind and a positive attitude are often taught at an early age. But research shows that employees of all ages flourish when their companies find new ways to inspire their employees, he says. As an

example, Takeuchi points to the way Volkswagen disrupted the assembly-line format and let some of its workers assemble cars as a team.

"Before, individuals just put two tires on one side of the car — very specialized work that makes it very dehumanizing," he says. "But by working as a team, it adds job complexity and autonomy. It enhances the motivation potential."

Thanks to the tech revolution, more and more organizations are thinking outside the box. Takeuchi believes that if that creativity continues to be funneled in the right direction, the results will not only improve the workplace, they will improve society as a whole.

"My research highlights the huge potential that individuals can have if they're more creative, productive and influential," he says. "Even changing a job slightly can make a big difference." 🌱

Riki Takeuchi (at left in both photos below) is teaching taekwondo to PhD students. The group meets regularly at the UT Dallas Activity Center.

