

What

do you know about

Kitao-san?

What's Mr. Yuichi Kitao, Kubota's new president like? We interviewed him to satisfy everyone's curiosity! From work to private life, he was so open minded and frank in answering twenty-four questions. We also asked five of Kitao-san's close friends to uncover his real face.

[Name] 北尾 裕一

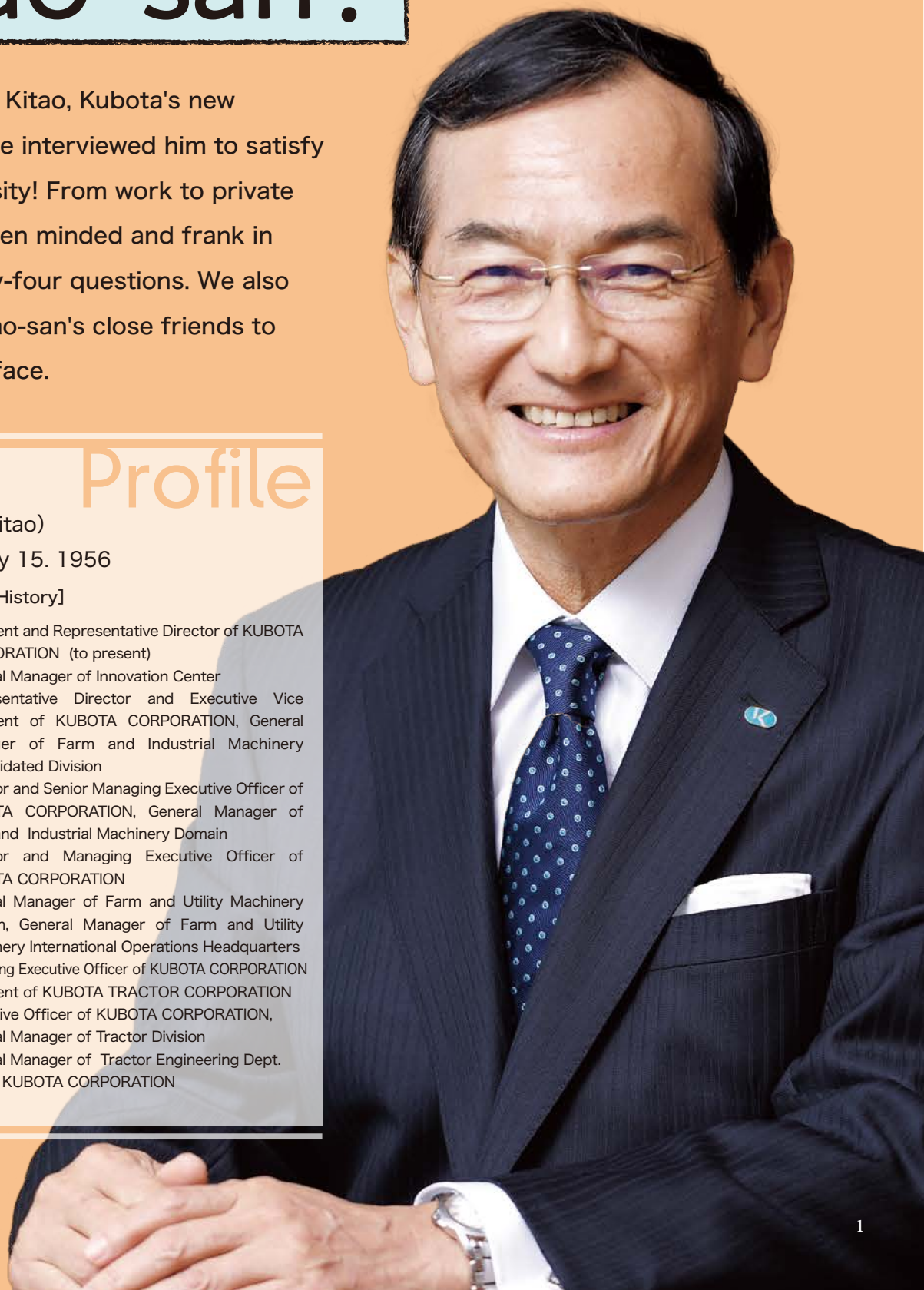
(Yuichi Kitao)

[Date of Birth] July 15, 1956

[Brief Occupational History]

January, 2020	President and Representative Director of KUBOTA CORPORATION (to present)
June, 2019	General Manager of Innovation Center
January, 2019	Representative Director and Executive Vice President of KUBOTA CORPORATION, General Manager of Farm and Industrial Machinery Consolidated Division
April, 2015	Director and Senior Managing Executive Officer of KUBOTA CORPORATION, General Manager of Farm and Industrial Machinery Domain
June, 2014	Director and Managing Executive Officer of KUBOTA CORPORATION
October, 2013	General Manager of Farm and Utility Machinery Division, General Manager of Farm and Utility Machinery International Operations Headquarters
April, 2013	Managing Executive Officer of KUBOTA CORPORATION
January, 2011	President of KUBOTA TRACTOR CORPORATION
April, 2009	Executive Officer of KUBOTA CORPORATION, General Manager of Tractor Division
April, 2005	General Manager of Tractor Engineering Dept.
April, 1979	Joined KUBOTA CORPORATION

Profile



Q.01

What were you like as a kid?

I was just an ordinary, relatively quiet boy, but I loved physical activities since a very young age!



Q.02

What was your childhood dream job?

I was such a great lover of robot animations that I remember once writing

"I WANT TO BE A ROBOT SCIENTIST"

in an essay during my early school years. [laughter]



What do you know about Kitao-san?

I first met Kitao-san at the university tennis club, so we've been friends for more than forty years. He has been my tennis partner and one of my good friend. He was intelligent, nice-looking, always modest, kind, and generous, so everyone, both men and women, liked him at university. He was good at both sports and his studies. Even though I rarely saw him study, he was good at writing, drafting, and speaking English. In those days, we were immersed in tennis, day in and day out. It was thanks to his intuition and decision in choosing the order of players that we managed to maintain our ranking in the league. His recent passion is golf, in which he is a low handicapper, but modest at the same time. When he mishits a shot, he often mutters "Not going well!" in Kansai dialect, but tenaciously recovers. In business management, he drives forward our digital transformation, working to introduce such things as IoT and AI into our business and making visits to ventures in Silicon Valley. I believe his relaxed leadership will bring about innovations in Kubota, gaining support from inside and outside the company.



Mr. Yo Okabe

(Pipe Systems Business Unit, Kubota Corporation)
is a friend from university and a colleague.

Q.03

What was your research topic at university?

In the Department of Naval Architecture and Ocean Engineering, I studied material fatigue strength. Day after day, at an underground laboratory, I tested metal test pieces and collected

data ... repeating the assiduous work. My studies in this field ultimately turned out to be useful, after joining Kubota, for parts strength calculations in designing tractors.

Q.04

Aside from research, what else do you remember from your student years?

I was immersed in competitive tennis in the university tennis club.

When asked which faculty I graduated from, I answer in fun, "I graduated from the tennis club." [laughter] We used to start training after lunch and finish around eight in the evening. As freshmen, we had to be ball boys almost all the time, and were not allowed to practice often. So, it was hard for me, but the experience increased my patience considerably.



What do you know about Kitao-san?

Q.05

How did you come to join Kubota?

When I graduated from the Department of Naval Architecture and Ocean Engineering, the shipbuilding industry was in a recession, so shipbuilding companies weren't hiring new graduates.

Then someone who's been a good friend of mine from junior high school told me about a good company in Osaka, which his grandfather had worked for.

Without his suggestion, I think I might've sought a job opportunity in the automobile industry or a trading firm.

Q.06

After joining Kubota, what job were you first assigned to?

I was assigned to the Tractor Engineering Department in charge of designing nameplates to be put on tractors. This used to be the traditional first assignment given to a greenhorn engineer back then. Even for such a small part, I was happy whenever my small ideas were adopted. At that time, we didn't use CAD; instead, we used a drafter and pencil to design all the parts.

Q.07

What was the first product you designed as an engineer?

I designed the transmission for a Ford tractor that we manufactured under an OEM contract. In fact, after about ten thousand units were produced, we began to receive many trouble reports, so I was searching for the cause. One day, I found an error in the strength calculations I used in designing. I was so mad at myself that

I didn't sleep at all that night,

and my boss severely scolded me when I reported it to him the next day.

Mr. Kenichi Shibayanagi

(NEC Solution Innovators, Ltd.)

is a friend from junior and senior high school.

What do you know about Kitao-san?



We became close especially during the last two years of high school, when I lived in dormitory, sometimes staying overnight at his home. He was very talented in math and physics and always taught me without reluctance. Aside from his studies, he was a saxophone player in the high school brass band, in which I also played. He was also a bassist in a band that entertained us with hits by the Ventures at our school festival. And he plays the piano well enough to have performed a duet with his wife, who majored in music, at their own wedding reception. He was also a good athlete and a competitive tennis player in the university tennis club. In addition, as a person, he is considerate and sincere. I remember, while he was chairing the publicity committee of the high school students' association, the father of a committee member passed away. He immediately decided to help out at the funeral, going from Kobe to as far as the father's house in Omachi, Nagano Prefecture. I recently heard he sought the advice of a doctor, who happens to be his friend, for a subordinate who is suffering from an illness. Our friendship still continues and I also visited his house during his stay in the United States.

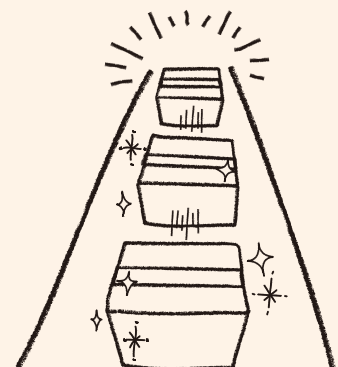
The fact that Kitao-san was appointed as the new president of Kubota—the company for which my grandfather worked years ago—will certainly further strengthen our ties. I offer my best wishes for the further development of Kubota.



Q.08

What was your motivation while engaging in development and engineering?

It was the greatest pleasure when a product I was involved in designing was put on the production line and shipped off. It takes about three years to develop a new model. You are extremely busy, especially in the weeks just before the start of mass production, until you manage to reach the goal in time. Therefore, you feel such a huge sense of accomplishment.



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Mr. Todd Stucke

(senior vice president of Kubota Tractor Corporation)

worked with Kitao-san during his assignment in the United States.

Q.09

Do you have any regrets regarding your past work?

I have many regrets ... Once, I developed a 120 HP tractor (MD tractor), the biggest ever at that time. After it was launched on the US market, the local sales manager said to me,

"It doesn't sell at all; show me how we can sell it."

I was quite depressed and, after that, I continued engaging in the development of so-called flagship models, or our biggest horsepower tractor models. Penetrating into a new market is always a difficult challenge. You need new technologies, and it takes time to build a sales network from scratch. Even so, if we manage to get upper-end models in the bigger HP range accepted by the market, smaller tractors also start selling soon after. So, I was always telling myself that launching a flagship model has great meaning even if it doesn't sell well at the beginning.

I met Ken in 2012, when Kubota was first entering the AG market, while he was serving as president of KTC. Entering a new frontier like this was challenging, but Ken's commitment never wavered, which led to establishing the foundation of confidence in Kubota in the new market. His curiosity about new technology and markets, together with his commitment, contributed to establishing Kubota's current position in North America. Ultimately, I believe his commitment and vision is what is leading Kubota to become a "household name" as a leading company in the United States.



I have often marveled at his uncanny ability to drive change while staying true to the core. Ken pushes for growth, but always keeps the customer first and never sacrifices Kubota's high standard of quality and reliability. In his actions, Ken continues the legacy of developing a Global Major Brand while staying true to the principle of "For Earth, For Life." But, more importantly, he genuinely cares about all those around him and takes the time to listen to everyone—both personally and from a business standpoint—always in the spirit of being "on your side," which makes him a great leader of unlimited possibilities. This leadership trait motivates all to do their best in delivering his vision.

I am honored to be on the Kubota team and look forward to working with Ken.

Q.10

How are you called by your colleagues and friends in English?

I'm called "Ken," which is how I was addressed by Mike (center in the photo), who was at that time the central division manager of Kubota Tractor Corporation (KTC). Even now, whenever I go to the US, everyone calls me Ken. I know it would be difficult in Japan to call each other by nicknames, but I also hope to create an open and friendly atmosphere in Japan, in which, for instance, people may address each other with "san" rather than with titles.



Appointed president of KTC in 2011, he often discussed with Mike how they would grow Kubota into a household name in the US.

Q.11

What else do you personally remember from your assignment in the US?

My first assignment there was when I was in my early forties. For a survey



The owner of Zimmerer Kubota (center), one of the most important dealers at that time, is a family friend.

on the US market, I visited 180 dealers or so. This experience gave me a first-hand understanding of what dealers think in doing business. One dealer I visited said with a menacing face, "The parts I ordered have not arrived. I won't let you go home until they arrive." We can laugh about that now, but this taught me how important every part is for a dealer. When I resided in the US again as the president of KTC about ten years later, the network I built during my first assignment helped me a lot.

Q.12

How did you become fluent in English?

My English is rather broken and I'm not yet very fluent, but in the end, I learned everything at work. I was forced to use English when I worked with Ford at a young age, so I struggled desperately, and over time, I became gradually confident in speaking English.

One tip I can give you for improving your English is to repeat what the other person says.



By repeating the phrases English speakers used, I learned how to say this and that in English.

What do you know about Kitao-san?

Q.13

How do you describe your own personality?

I'm patient and quiet. And I'm not double-faced because I'm not good at it.

Q.14

How would your family describe your personality?

[After some silence] Maybe they think I'm a little too particular about things, even though I don't think so. [laughter]

Q.15

What are your favorite foods?

I like everything. I've been a big eater since my youth. Among alcoholic beverages, I would say I prefer wine.



Q.16

What is your motto?

Because I have a long experience in product development, my motto is **to follow rules and principles.**

Products are always honest and you can see the essence of matters in the words of dealers and customers. One phrase I heard recently and liked is "grow people before making goods; management needs to be mature before growing people." This was an idea cherished by Mr. Daizo Odawara, the third president of

Kubota. It concisely shows the importance of human resources to a company and what is required of top management.



With his colleagues with whom he worked together at the Hokkaido Office from his second year with Kubota. He learned the realities of agriculture there.

Q.17

What did you think when you heard of the plan to appoint you as president?

Having been involved in the company's management and working closely with Mr. Kimata for five years and a half, I asked myself whether I'd be sufficiently capable in succeeding him and thought about this a great deal. In the end, I felt it was my destiny, and decided to accept the appointment.

Q.18

What are your current interests outside of work?

I love golf! I began playing golf about fifteen years ago in place of tennis, which I had played since my youth. I recorded my best score last year, and I have a handicap of nine. I think I'm good at putting. But I may be too busy to play golf as often as before...



Ms. Atsuko Ohira

(Compact Tractor Engineering Dept., Kubota Corporation)
worked with him in the Tractor Engineering Dept.



When the Tractor Engineering Department was divided into two in 1988, I was assigned to the section for large tractors. A total of fifty-four people worked there, including Kitao-san, and we worked hard day after day to get the business out of the red. To expand our market, we traveled many hours to overseas destinations again and again.

Even though we faced difficulties all the time in developing new models and what not, the office was always vibrant. Kitao-san was always nice to us, always smiling. Once, when we were very busy, he saw a rainbow from an office window and said "Oh, how it recharges me," and his words recharged us as well. When we attained the target in our work and received prizes, Kitao-san proposed that we have a party to thank each other, gathering all members and also those who worked with us from outside our department. We had a great time in a very friendly atmosphere. He once told us about a fiasco from his early days. Because he drank too much, he made two round trips on a train between terminal stations before he finally went home by taxi (maybe he might make a fuss when he reads this). As the general manager of the Tractor Engineering Department, he took the lead in promoting health, walking up stairs to the office on the fifth floor every morning. I wonder if this is his secret for sustained health.

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Q.19

How do you refresh yourself when you are tired?

I engage in some physical activity! And I breathe in fresh air outdoors!



**What
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Mr. Kenji Morikane

(Agricultural Tractor Engineering Dept., Kubota Corporation)
worked with him in the Tractor Engineering Dept.

Q.20

How do you keep fit?

Because I want to keep my muscles flexible, I go to the gym once a week. I don't do hard exercises, but train mainly my inner muscles. I also keep track of the number of steps I walk each day, but I hardly achieve my target of 10,000 steps a day.



It was about forty years ago. I had engaged in the development of large tractors since joining the company, and was in charge of assembling prototypes and testing at research stages. Kitao-san was in charge of the engineering design of transmissions. So we've been friends from the same workplace. When he joined us, the arrival of an intelligent, nice-looking and sport-loving young man made the office news among employees. While he engaged in the development of transmissions for Ford, which involved just a few people, once a problem arose, the engineering and research staff would continue holding discussions late into the night. He remained firm in sticking to what he believed was right as an engineer, but never missed the opportunity to thank other team members and show warm considerations to all, which I really appreciate. Now, both of us have grown older, but I would like to work further to develop products that meet customers' wishes. Kitao-san, I know you will have to follow a hectic schedule as president, but we will welcome you anytime at your old workplace when you visit the Sakai Plant.

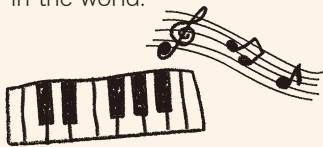


Q.21

**What type of music
do you like?**

I like **modern jazz.**

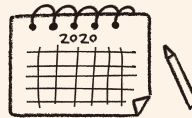
As a student, I listened to Oscar Peterson a lot, and I especially love jazz pianists, such as Hiromi Uehara, who has become a rising star in the world.



Q.22

**How do you spend your
holidays?**

I rarely spend quiet moments at home; instead, I tend to cram my schedule with plans to meet people.



Q.24

**What do you look most
forward to after becoming
president?**

I have met so many people so far, and I somehow came here thanks to those people. Now that I'm in a position to oversee the whole company, I'll have opportunities to meet even more people working for Kubota in such areas as the Water and Environment Infrastructure business and indirect departments.

**I look forward to having
new encounters with
them.**

It seems I find myself more comfortable in the open and casual atmosphere. So, I'd like to encourage that kind of culture, in which all workplace members can feel free to speak out on what they think, free from hierarchical constraints. I believe discussions and communication in business are most important, but sometimes I may rely also on the benefit of socializing over drinks outside work.



Q.23

**Do you have anything
you want to tell our
young employees?**

No success comes without failure. In that regard, thanks to the generosity of my bosses and colleagues,

**I was allowed
to make
countless flops
over many
years.**



At an event where engineers compete in ideas for new products. He has taken on challenges to give shape to his ideas since he was a young engineer.

Nowadays, however, every department works on such a tight schedule that you may not have time to fail. I hope we'll come up with some idea to have a little more leeway.

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