

Akio Morita

In this lesson, you will read a short biography about a famous businessman from Japan who helped ease trade relations with other nations.

Pre-Reading

A. Warm-Up Questions

1. What is a Sony Walkman?
Have you ever owned one?
2. Besides the Walkman and the video cassette recorder, what other products has Sony produced?
3. What Sony products do you own?
4. Why do you think the founders of the company chose the name "Sony"?
5. Are you interested in electronic products? If so, what kind of products are you most interested in?
Have you ever been in a Sony store?



B. Vocabulary Preview

Match up as many meanings and words as you can before you read.
Check this exercise again after seeing the words in context on page 2.

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|---------------------|--|
| _____ 1. brew | a) to help, to support |
| _____ 2. marketing | b) to stop working, to give up one's job |
| _____ 3. financing | c) to prepare, to make a drink such as beer, tea, etc. |
| _____ 4. strategy | d) a sudden attack of illness in the brain |
| _____ 5. encourage | e) selling |
| _____ 6. innovation | f) a plan |
| _____ 7. stroke | g) the making of new things |
| _____ 8. resign | h) the raising and using of money |

Reading

1. Akio Morita was the cofounder of Sony Corporation.
2. Morita was born in Nagoya, Japan, on January 26, 1921. His family had **brewed** sake for many generations, and he was expected to join the family business.
3. Instead, Morita became a physicist. On May 7, 1946, he and Masaru Ibuka founded Tokyo Telecommunications Engineering Corporation. Ibuka was in charge of research and developing products. Morita took care of **marketing, financing**, employee relations, and expanding their company internationally.
4. In 1958, they changed the company's name to Sony. They wanted a name that was easy for people in other countries to say and to remember. It was the first step in their **strategy** for expanding their business into a global corporation.
5. In 1960, Morita moved to the United States to lead Sony Corporation of America. In 1961, Sony became the first Japanese company to offer shares on the New York Stock Exchange. This **encouraged** other Japanese companies to raise money from foreign sources instead of borrowing from Japanese banks.
6. Over the years, Morita's creativity and **innovation** resulted in the development of products such as the Walkman and the video cassette recorder.
7. Morita also expanded Sony's operations. In 1968, Sony became involved in music software. In 1979, the Sony Prudential Life Insurance company was founded. In 1988, Sony bought CBS Records and, a year later, Columbia Pictures.
8. Morita also worked to introduce Japanese culture and to ease Japan's trade relations with other nations. He was very good at this, and his cheerful personality made him popular with business and political leaders around the world. Many countries, including Japan, gave him their highest awards for his work.
9. Morita's energy and drive carried over to his personal life. He began to ski, play tennis, and scuba dive later in life.
10. In 1993, Morita suffered a **stroke** while playing tennis. He **resigned** as chairman of Sony, but remained as honorary chairman until his death on October 3, 1999.

"If you go through life thinking that your way is always best, all the new ideas in the world will pass you by."

—Akio Morita

Comprehension

A. True or False?

Read the statements below.

If the statement is true, write T beside the sentence.

If it is false, write F and correct the information.

- _____ 1. Akio Morita joined his family brewing business.
- _____ 2. In Tokyo Telecommunications, Morita looked after research and development.
- _____ 3. Morita was a very creative person.
- _____ 4. Sony is involved in many businesses besides electronics.
- _____ 5. Morita helped bring Japanese culture to America.

B. Ask and Answer

Practice asking and answering the following questions with your partner.

Then write your answers in complete sentences in your notebook.

- 1. What was the name of the company
Akio Morita founded with Masaru Ibuka?
- 2. What were Morita's responsibilities in this company?
- 3. Why did Morita and Ibuka decide to change the name of their company?
- 4. In 1961, Sony offered shares of its company on the New York Stock
Exchange. How did this action help other Japanese companies?
- 5. Give four adjectives to describe Morita's personality.
- 6. Why was Morita popular with business leaders around the world?
- 7. Besides electronics, what other businesses is Sony involved in?

Vocabulary Review

Choose the word or phrase with the closest meaning to the underlined word or phrase in the following sentences.

1. Morita was the cofounder of Sony Corporation.
a) employee
b) worker
c) person who starts a business with another person
2. Masaru Ibuka was in charge of research and developing new products.
a) interested in
b) responsible for
c) paying for
3. Morita took care of expanding their company internationally.
a) making larger
b) traveling
c) selling
4. Morita's cheerful personality made him popular with leaders around the world.
a) hard-working
b) happy
c) large
5. It became easier for Japanese companies to raise money from foreign sources.
a) lift
b) collect
c) look for
6. Morita's drive carried over to his personal life.
a) make a car move
b) happiness
c) ambition and motivation
7. His creativity resulted in the development of many new products.
a) money
b) hard work
c) ability to make new things

Discussion

1. Why do you think Akio Morita was able to build such a successful business?
2. Why do you think Japanese companies have been so successful in the electronics industry?
3. Do you buy many foreign-made products? Give examples.
4. Do you prefer to buy products that are made in your own country? Why or why not?
5. Japan is very famous for its electronics. What other products is Japan famous for?