

The Seasons We Share

I place great importance on the span of a year. I believe that only after spending all four seasons—spring, summer, fall, and winter—as part of the same organization, seeing, hearing, and experiencing it firsthand, can one truly understand what that organization is like. That is why I often ask employees who joined us as experienced hires about a year ago, “Now that you’ve actually worked here, what do you think of our company?”

The answers vary in wording, but they tend to share a common theme. They say that while the company has the systems and structure of a large corporation, at times it feels like a multinational company and at others like an agile startup. They also say that collaboration across departments comes naturally and that people can focus on their own responsibilities without unnecessary competition. Another point frequently mentioned is that it is a good place for women to build their careers.

I, too, often reflect on what kind of company and corporate culture we should build together. One thing I value greatly is a culture where people can communicate openly and sincerely. We have many “straight shooters” at Youngone. When they need to say, “This won’t work right now,” they do not hesitate to express their judgment clearly rather than soften their words out of concern for how others might react. So when someone says, “No, we can’t do that,” and has sound reasoning to support that view, I actually commend them for speaking their mind.

Speaking candidly, however, also requires relationships in which such honesty can be trusted and accepted. A workplace is, after all, a social relationship formed through work. At Youngone, however, we have developed a culture of our own: we do not intrude excessively into one another’s personal lives, yet we share in each other’s happiness and stand by one another through difficult times. Perhaps it is precisely this healthy sense of distance that sometimes allows us to confide in colleagues about concerns we cannot even share with family or friends, and to find answers together. As CEO, I also sometimes share my concerns with our employees and seek their wisdom. When people have weathered difficult times together, a deep sense of understanding and trust naturally develops.

This trust is also reflected in the way we work. Some organizations may require employees to repeat instructions back to confirm that they have understood them correctly. Youngone is closer to the opposite. When unnecessary layers of confirmation are reduced, decisions can be made and carried out more quickly. An honest, truthful,

and principled attitude also aligns closely with one of Youngone's core values: "Honesty & Integrity."

I believe corporate culture is not something that can be created overnight simply by putting up an impressive slogan. It takes shape over time through the accumulation of relationships and attitudes like these. The conversations we have each day, the way we treat one another, and the way we work all come together to give an organization its distinctive character. At Youngone, long-standing values coexist with new ideas. Perhaps that is why newcomers sometimes see us as an organization that is as nimble and flexible as a startup.

Not long ago, one employee said something that stayed with me: "I think I spend much more time eating and talking with my team leader than I do with my husband." I laughed for quite a while when I heard that, but it also reminded me just how much of our lives we spend together at work.

Life is made up of many seasons. The time we are sharing now with good people is surely one of those precious moments in our lives. Time passes, but the memories of having shared both hardships and joys remain with us for a long time. I hope that the days we spend working together can give someone strength and allow them to look forward to tomorrow. I believe that as these days accumulate, they create a healthy corporate culture while also making our own lives a little stronger and warmer.

Over the past two months, I have been truly happy to connect with readers as a contributor to *The Rotary*. I hope to remember this, too, for a long time as a precious season shared with so many of you.