

Breaking Barriers: My Journey as a Patent Attorney

--Before Becoming a Patent Attorney

I am a licensed patent attorney, and I have been working in this field for more than 30 years. To help you understand my journey, allow me to share the journey spanning from post-university graduation to my current career as a patent attorney, as this phase is crucial juncture in my life.



In my twenties, over 40 years ago in Japan, societal perceptions equated a single woman in her twenties to a Christmas cake—her value depreciating by half past the age of 25. In this conservative climate, I married at 25 and became a mother at 26. While still employed as an engineer post-marriage, I reluctantly left my job due to pregnancy. It was widely accepted that a woman's optimal time to exit the workforce were limited to marriage and childbirth.

Following a divorce when my child was two years old, I re-entered the workforce, seeking engineering roles. However, my applications were consistently rejected, except by one patent attorney who employed me as a technical assistant. This marked the beginning of my journey in the field of intellectual property.

Due to lack of my legal knowledge and the absence of a patent attorney license, I had no choice but to accept a modest salary while supporting my child. However, motivated by a strong desire to ensure a better future for both my daughter and myself - particularly in terms of education - I made a decision to pursue a career as a patent attorney.

I transitioned to a patent firm with a reduced workload, I devoted my evenings to extensive study. On weekends, I spent time with my child at the park, balancing parenting responsibilities with my legal studies. After dedicating five years to studying and passing the bar exam at the age of 35, I began working as a patent attorney at a prominent firm. This position offered a salary sufficient to support my

daughter's upbringing.

--Building My Career

I spent five years as an associate at the firm, accumulating valuable experience in the patent field. While some client companies entrusted me with their cases, I began to notice disparities in salary between myself and male counterparts. Additionally, the firm's conservative tradition meant that female attorneys, including myself, were not considered for partnership—a rarity in Japan three decades ago.

Recognizing that staying in this environment would forever confine me to a subordinate role, I made a bold decision to leave the firm and establish my own office, at the age of 40. Walking away from the security of stable employment without a clearly defined plan was undeniably daunting. Yet, I chose to embrace the uncertainty.

I asked my mother and daughter to stand by me as I pursued this path, even if my earnings were minimal. They made a firm commitment to support me, despite the absence of immediate income.

Thus, with only a personal computer, a telephone, and a fax machine in a small rented room, I founded Kamitani Patent Office.

--My time at Kamitani Patent Office

Establishing an office with no existing clients was a bold move.

I visited companies that had been clients when I was an associate attorney. Most of them were large corporations and did not respond positively to my approach. In Japan, particularly in the political field, only a candidate possessing at least one of the following – *ziban* (succession), *kaban* (financial resources), or *kanban* (well-known name), can win an election. This doctrine also applies to starting a new business. Since I had none of those, no company or corporation hired me to handle their intellectual property.

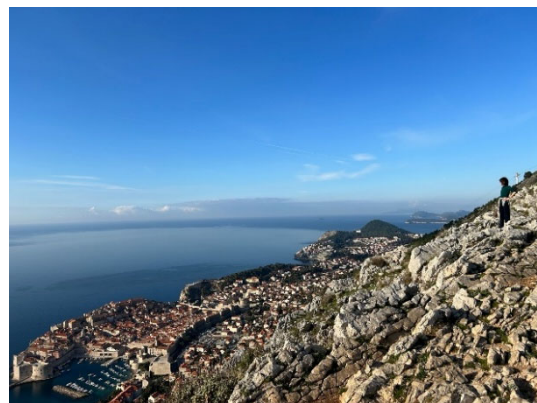
When confronted with difficulties, drawing from past experiences has been instrumental in maintaining resilience. Navigating the hardships of divorce and single parenthood tested me in ways I never imagined. I believe that I can overcome any obstacle since I am now a certified patent attorney and my daughter is now grown and living on her own. I have weathered the most challenging days.

My office is modest in size. I consider my ability to align with the client's purpose, namely providing tailored work, to be my strong point compared to big law firms. Many individuals and small entities often lack dedicated IP resources as well as funding, so my mission is to break down barriers in the IP field for them at minimal cost. Obtaining a patent right is a small success, but clients have expressed enthusiasm about it. Some even recommended my office to their business partners.

While I had none of the traditional advantages—financial resources, professional name recognition, or potential for career advancement, I believe that it is possible to build name recognition and credibility in the IP field. Guided by this conviction, I committed myself to studying court decisions, authoring papers and delivered seminars to refine my expertise. Years later, I was invited a reception where IP managers from major companies gathered, enabling me to present my office to them. Through connections with open-minded senior IP managers, I was able to secure opportunities that would have otherwise been unattainable and handled patent applications for their companies.

--A Message to Women Challenging Traditional Norms

In the past, when others sought my advice on similar decisions, I often emphasized caution and encouraged thorough reconsideration. However, my current stance encourages breaking free from unreasonable constraints and barriers.



Being left without adequate protection is similar to standing in the heavy rain without an umbrella; one might get soaked and find it challenging to stay firm in difficult times. Nevertheless, there will be someone to offer support, and at times, you may experience a refreshing breeze.

Surviving tough situations builds resilience and confidence in your ability to overcome future challenges.

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