

POWER OF CONVICTION

Toastmasters is a place where leaders are made. Leaders need to take up a task and insure that it is completed. They need to have the power conviction to carry their colleagues and teammates along. Today I am going to tell the story of one such leader whose conviction saved many lives.

March 11, 2001 was a day that changed our lives. It was the day of the Great Tohoku Earthquake. It was followed by a huge tsunami. There was so much destruction. Pain, sorrow and grief everywhere. We bowed our heads to the force of nature.

There was a horrible accident at the Fukushima Daiichi Plant due to mismanagement of the Tokyo Electric power company.

Have you heard of Fudai in Iwate Prefecture?

In the rubble of Japan's northeast coast, one small village stands as tall as ever after the tsunami. No homes were swept away. In fact, they barely got wet. Fudai is the village that survived – thanks to a huge wall once deemed a mayor's expensive folly and now vindicated as the community's salvation.

Towns like Taro, Miyako suffered huge destruction.

The 3,000 residents living between mountains behind a cove owe their lives to a late leader who saw the devastation of an earlier tsunami and made it the priority of his four-decade tenure to defend his people from the next one. His 51-foot (15.5-meter) floodgate between mountainsides took a dozen years to build and meant spending more than \$30 million in today's dollars."

"However you look at it, the effectiveness of the floodgate and seawall was truly impressive," Fudai Mayor Hiroshi Fukawatari said. Towns to the north and south also braced against tsunamis with concrete seawalls, breakwaters and other protective structures. But none were as tall as Fudai's. The town of Taro believed it had the ultimate fort – a double-layered 33-foot-tall (10-meter-tall) seawall spanning 1.6 miles (2.5 kilometers) across a bay. It proved no match for the tsunami two months ago.

In Fudai, the waves rose as high as 66 feet (20 meters), as water marks show on the floodgate's towers. So some ocean water did flow over but it caused minimal damage. The gate broke the tsunami's main thrust. And the community is lucky to have two mountainsides flanking the gate, offering a natural barrier.

The man credited with saving Fudai is the late Kotaku Wamura, a 10-term mayor whose political reign began in the ashes of World War II and ended in 1987. Fudai, about 320 miles

(510 kilometers) north of Tokyo, depends on the sea. Fishermen boast of the seaweed they harvest. A pretty, white-sand beach lures tourists every summer.

But Wamura never forgot how quickly the sea could turn. Massive earthquake-triggered tsunamis flattened Japan's northeast coast in 1933 and 1896. In Fudai, the two disasters destroyed hundreds of homes and killed 439 people. "When I saw bodies being dug up from the piles of earth, I did not know what to say. I had no words," Wamura wrote of the 1933 tsunami in his book about Fudai, "A 40-Year Fight Against Poverty." He vowed it would never happen again.

Fudai is fortunate to be located in a valley just narrow enough to be fortified against rising waters. The size and the expense of doing so put many off his plan, but in the end, Wamura won and the floodgates were finished in 1984. The decision making process in this case must have been very complicated.

First of all was the cost. That decision would have to take into account not only the staggering construction costs, but also maintenance as well as the indirect costs of not having easy access to the ocean. How do the people of Fudai interact with the coast? What is their economy based on? Fishing? Tourism? Inland manufacturing that has no need for coastal access?

In 1967, the town erected a 51-foot (15.5-meter) seawall to shield homes behind the fishing port. But Wamura wasn't finished. He had a bigger project in mind for the cove up the road, where most of the community was located. That area needed a floodgate with panels that could be lifted to allow the Fudai River to empty into the cove and lowered to block tsunamis.

He insisted the structure be as tall as the seawall. The village council initially balked. "They weren't necessarily against the idea of floodgates, just the size," said Yuzo Mifune, head of Fudai's resident services and an unofficial floodgate historian. "But Wamura somehow persuaded them that this was the only way to protect lives." Construction began in 1972 despite lingering concerns about its size as well as bitterness among landowners forced to sell land to the government.

Even current Mayor Fukawatari, who helped oversee construction, had his doubts. "I did wonder whether we needed something this big," he said in an interview at his office. The concrete structure spanning 673 feet (205 meters) was completed in 1984. The total bill of 3.56 billion yen was split between the prefecture and central government, which financed public works as part of its postwar economic strategy.

On March 11, after the 9.0 earthquake hit, workers remotely closed the floodgate's four main panels. Smaller panels on the sides jammed, and a firefighter had to rush down to shut them by hand. The tsunami battered the white beach in the cove, leaving debris and fallen trees. But behind the floodgate, the village is virtually untouched.

Wamura left office three years after the floodgate was completed. He died in 1997 at age 88. Since the tsunami, residents have been visiting his grave to pay respects. At his retirement, Wamura stood before village employees to bid farewell: "Even if you encounter opposition, have conviction and finish what you start. In the end, people will understand."

Forewarned Is Forearmed

Or, as the Japanese say:

備えあれば憂いなし

sonae areba urei nashi

In contrast to the accusations of [inadequate disaster planning on the part of Tokyo Electric](#) at their Fukushima nuclear power plant, Fudai is a reminder of the power of one man's vision and determination. Wamura knew what had to be done, overcame protests from all sides, and, in the end, saved his village and its people.

Toastmasters, if you believe in something which is correct keep that faith and convince ppl around you. But please don't be stubborn. Because stubbornness makes conviction look stupid.