



Motoyo Yamane

# A Lovely and Compelling Voice for Life

---

## TAMAKI KAWASAKI

---

*Based on her long experience as a broadcast announcer, Motoyo Yamane focuses on developing the speaking abilities of children at study sessions all over Japan. Her drive, flexibility and positive outlook provide a valuable model for how to live a long, useful and satisfying life.*

“I learned about what is important in life during my thirty-six years at NHK,” says Motoyo Yamane, who entered Japan’s public broadcasting organization NHK in 1971 as a new announcer and went on to become the first woman to serve as the head of the announcers department.

“When you join a TV station, even if you don’t have any skills yet, you get saddled with a title. I was always reminded of how much I didn’t know, and the first ten years were really tough,” recalls Yamane.

When I was just starting out, I couldn’t even read a three-line script properly, and was disparaged as being ‘incompetent.’” Despite her frustration and humiliation, she continued to polish her reading, listening and speaking skills every day, wanting to become an announcer capable of reading the manuscript for the news properly, hosting programs and doing live broadcasts.

During her many years working for NHK, the project that had the greatest influence on Yamane’s



Yamane during her time as a broadcast announcer at NHK



Yamane reading aloud to a group of children

life was an art documentary series. She encountered the creations and daily lives of over four hundred outstanding Japanese artists, and saw firsthand their determination not to rest on their laurels, and the endeavors that the average person could not begin to equal. “Their mindset of not being afraid of reinventing themselves, and their attitude of beginning anew each day and continuing to diligently improve themselves, even after growing older, has a huge impact on how I think,” she says.

After retiring from NHK, Yamane, along with other retired NHK announcers, founded the “Kotoba no Mori” group and began touring the country to work with children on their speaking skills. In her travels around Japan to see firsthand how speech was taught, she found that the spoken language skills of many children who grew up in nuclear families were weak.

“The reason children have trouble with relationships with other people is because they don’t have the words to connect with them,” she explains. “I strongly felt that for them to avoid conforming to what others say and create their own happiness in life, they must be able to express themselves in their own words, not words borrowed from someone else.”

To develop the speaking abilities of children and to help them thrive, four years ago Yamane set up a training course for instructors on how to read aloud. This brought people together to create groups around Japan dedicated to reading aloud. She has already sent out 210 graduates, but maintaining the course and updating the texts takes a lot of



Yamane's training courses for instructors on how to read aloud attract many interested students

work, both mentally and physically. Moreover, she has continued her well-received narration work. Because of the amount of focus and stress that these projects involve, however, she loses weight with each program she does. She believes that “to be active and do good work, a healthy body is essential,” and has begun to take better care of herself.

Yamane says the experience she gained during her years as an announcer taught her more than a library worth of books ever could, allowing her to sharpen her skills in reading, listening and speaking in Japanese—a priceless asset.

Even after having made a living by her voice for many years, Yamane notes that “it is really odd, but you can’t completely control your voice.” Learning more about how the voice is used in kabuki, Noh, opera and language acquisition, she finds new aspects of the subject she had missed. Each new discovery shines light onto more things to learn, and continues to spark her curiosity.

This year Yamane started a new course about the power of the voice, and is busily engaged in inviting lecturers. “There are some who say out of kindness that I should stop because I have become too old,” she remarks with a laugh, “but I don’t believe in stopping just because you are seventy.” Her latest interest, she adds, is multilingual education.

Feelings turn into voices, and voices become words. “Voices are what create the language of a people, so I want to keep learning more and more,” is Yamane’s parting phrase—delivered, of course, in her beautiful and refined voice. ▮