**Soichiro Honda**

Perseverance is the 1%

“Success is 99% failure”, is a quote attributed to Soichiro Honda but how can this make sense and if it does what does that it mean?

Soichiro grew up with a high level of natural curiosity and an affinity for machines. His father was a blacksmith who opened a bicycle shop where he worked in his spare time. He preferred learning hands on there and had little tolerance for structured education. While in Futamata Senior Elementary School (middle school) he is he is quoted as telling his principal, ‘I am not impressed by diplomas. They don’t do the work’ which shows that his attitude and spirit towards independent thinking and developing real useful knowledge and understanding.

In at the age of fifteen in 1922 after seeing an advertisement in a bicycle magazine Soichiro left his home prefecture (state) of Shizuoka for a mechanical apprenticeship in Tokyo. Working there he stood out and was noticed as being a hard and innovative worker by his boss, he developed a relationship with his boss and learned many things about business and mechanics. After apprenticing for this company for six years Honda returned to Shizuoka to operate a new company branch as well as organize another company, The Tohai Seiki Company, to design and manufacture new internal combustion engine piston rings.

During this time Honda had a vision to develop and provide piston rings for the Toyota motor company. He worked to perfect his piston ring design finally coming up with a product that he felt was suitable for Toyota’s needs only to be sent home because it did not meet their specifications. After failing many times he finally succeed and was awarded this a contract to produce rings by Toyota.

After WWII gasoline was in very short supply so Honda fell back on his mechanical background and decided that bicycles could fill the people’s transportation needs. Raw manufacturing materials being in short supply as well he rallied bike shops through out the nation for the resources to proceed. Acquiring those resources and support from the shops he developed a bike for this purpose which was less than idea, but continued to improve on the the concept producing the “Super Cub” which became a success at home and abroad.

Eventually Honda’s company became the leading motorcycle manufacturer in the word as well as world wide successful automotive company. I chose this story because I can relate to Honda’s attitude in learning by doing and his perseverance to keep pushing forward regardless of past or current results. I also feel the need to understand process fundamentals even if I have to completely reengineer a task to do so, which seem to be qualities that attribute to Soichiro's success as well. I see the “99% failure” he relates is only what others see as failure but in this sense his failure equals 100% dedication to understanding and determination to causes which brought out the 1% success that really mattered.

Citations:

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