school love singing. Right now, they are learning ‘Sing’ by the Carpenters. Please watch.

(Video of ‘Sing’ by the Carpenters as sung by the children of Sakiyama Elementary School)

Mr. Cohen : I hope you enjoyed our presentation. Goto is a wonderful place.

Natsumi : Please come visit!

Yuudai : We are waiting for you!

Ms. Tsutsumi : That is all for our presentation about Goto. Thank you.

Everyone: Thank you.

Talented JET Participants – The Global Personnel that Companies Want

MC : Thank you for a very enjoyable presentation.

MC : Next, we have a presentation from Mr. Yoji Abe, Manager of the Global HR and HR Development Section, Human Resources and General Affairs Department of Sojitz Corporation, and Mr. James Regent, a former participant in the JET Programme. The theme of their presentation is ‘The Appeal of JET Participants - The Global Personnel That Companies Are Seeking.’ Thank you, Mr. Abe and Mr. Regent.

Mr. Yoji Abe, Manager of the Global HR and HR Development Section, Human Resources and General Affairs Department, Sojitz Corporation : Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. As I have been so kindly introduced, I am Yoji Abe of Sojitz Corporation’s Global HR and HR Development Section.

Mr. James Regent, Controller Section, Sojitz Corporation : And I am James Regent of Sojitz Corporation’s Controller Section.

Mr. Abe : We are very proud to have been given time to present here today. Thank you very much for this opportunity to talk to you about Sojitz’s involvement with the JET Programme.

As I will describe in more detail, we at Sojitz really love the JET Programme. We have loved JET for five years now.
I think I’ve already decided I’m going to go to Gotō for my holidays at the end of the year—JET is that amazing.

I’d like to explain briefly about what companies look for in global personnel. Our presentation will follow the following agenda. First, a brief introduction of the company, our reasons for wanting global personnel, then, we’ll introduce our JET employees, like James here. Then, I’d like to talk about what the appeal is of JET.

Firstly, allow me to give a brief explanation of our company. Sojitz Corporation has undergone a merger only relatively recently, so you may be more familiar with the names, Nissho-Iwai and Nichimen. These two companies merged in 2004, and Sojitz Corporation came into being. We are a general trading house. I’d like to briefly explain the current network of our group. If I could ask you to look at our operating bases, as you can see, because we are a trading house, we have more operating bases overseas than we do in Japan. Just four bases in Japan, as opposed to 83 overseas. It is the same for the number of our group companies—113 in Japan versus 283 overseas. So, as you can see, we are a very global general trading company.

It is not easy to explain what a general trading company does, but simply put, we currently have nine business units—from automotive, aerospace, environmental infrastructure to food and, more recently, overseas, we have entered the retail sector, such as convenience stores and supermarkets. James here is involved in operations primarily supporting our machinery-related businesses of these three divisions here at the top, which mean.

Next, I’d like to touch on why Sojitz wants to employ global personnel, and why we employ former participants of the JET Programme every year. Firstly, we are a trading company, which means that our business originally started with exports and imports. This means that our company has been doing business with other countries for a very long time. However, doing business overseas has become extremely complicated. In the past, it was just imports and exports, and they used to say that instinct, experience and guts would be enough to get the job done. Of course, it was never really that simple, but business has become extremely complicated, and it is becoming more and more difficult to do business overseas. Doing business overseas has also become more important than ever. And with that, the type of personnel we are seeking has become more sophisticated and global.

As such, for us as a general trading house, the non-Japanese employees we employ at our overseas bases have become increasingly important. At the same time, it has also become imperative to make our employees at Sojitz headquarters more globally oriented. We started with training our Japanese employees and reinforcing their English language skills, but there are limits to what that alone can achieve. That led to the need to recruit non-Japanese personnel at our Japanese headquarters. This is the main reason we are looking for global personnel.
I’d now like to move on to introducing James. I’ll call on James to explain why he joined Sojitz, and why Sojitz recruited James.

Mr. Regent: Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. If I may take this opportunity to introduce myself once more, I was born and raised in Pittsburgh, in the American state of Pennsylvania. As you can see from this photograph, Pittsburgh is not as big as Los Angeles or New York, but it is not a small city either. After I graduated from high school, I attended Georgetown University in Washington DC, where I majored in linguistics. My second language and minor was Japanese. This gave me a strong interest in Japan, and I applied for the JET Programme. For two years, from 2009 to 2011, I worked as an ALT in elementary and junior high schools in Washimiya-machi in Saitama Prefecture. Washimiya has since merged with the city of Kuki next door and is now part of Kuki.

The photograph at bottom right shows something that many of you may already know. That is Washinomiya Shrine, which is said to be the oldest shrine in the Kanto region. The main character in the manga comic book, Lucky Star, has a part-time job at this shrine, so even though Washimiya is a relatively quiet town, it gets very lively at New Year’s, when large numbers of otaku who are fans of the manga come to visit. I worked as an ALT for two years in Washimiya before joining Sojitz in 2011.

Mr. Abe: When James first joined Sojitz in 2011, I was actually not in Japan. I was working in our US offices at the time. While I was in the States, I heard that the company had started recruiting foreigners in Japan, and in some respects, I was both surprised and delighted. Sojitz head office had never been very enthusiastic about hiring foreigners in Japan, however, in 2011, James joined the company. This was wonderful news for us, but James, what made you decide to join Sojitz?

Mr. Regent: There were three main reasons. The first was that it was a trading company, but more than the possibility of working anywhere in the world, I was rather attracted to the aspect that it is an industry in which you can create work anywhere in the world.

As for the second and third reasons why I joined Sojitz, to explain a bit of the background, in my second year of JET, I attended the annually held Conference for Returning JETs for JET Programme participants who are planning to return to their home countries. As part of that conference, there was a career fair. Sojitz was participating in that fair, and that was the first time that I met Sojitz’s recruiting team. As I talked to them, I was very attracted by the fact that, even though I wasn’t a new graduate, they would train and educate me in the same way as they do for new graduate recruits. That was the second reason. The third reason was that I got the sense that this company was engaged earnestly and sincerely in the promotion of globalisation, so I really wanted to join Sojitz.
Mr. Abe: So, you joined Sojitz in 2011, and you were first assigned to the HR and General Affairs Department. At that time, the company had officially launched its global HR strategy and was engaged in a variety of initiatives. As part of that, you had three main duties: firstly, cultivating the global attributes of our Japanese employees, people just like me, providing training for our non-Japanese personnel at our overseas bases, and recruiting non-Japanese personnel for head office. Did your experience on the JET Program help you in those three fields?

Mr. Regent: It definitely helped. When we start with a training plan, for example, some kind of event—at school it would be a lesson plan, for a company it would be a training programme—there is an overarching process from concept proposal through to implementation, and that is something I learned through my experience with JET. To give a concrete example, say you have a project or event, and there are a number of stages within that project. Before you move onto the next stage, you have to ask yourself, have you consulted appropriately with the appropriate people? Have you engaged everyone involved properly? Have you shared information properly with people who might have nothing to do with the project now, but who could be involved at a later date? This culture of nemawashi, or laying the groundwork, that is unique to Japan is something that I learned on JET. Of course, there were times when I failed in this even after I joined the company, when I felt that what my manager was asking was too much bother—not you, of course, Mr. Abe.

Mr. Abe: That’s okay. (Laughter)

Mr. Regent: So I learned that kind of thing and have put it to use in the HR and General Affairs Department. When it comes to recruitment as well, and this goes without saying, when I was teaching in front of a class, I naturally developed presentation skills, and because of that every day, I was looking at things from the other person’s
perspective and thinking about what I needed to do to engage that person. As that was something I did every day in class, I think I have been able to draw on those skills in my recruitment work as well.

Mr. Abe : I see. So you acquired your excellent nemawashi skills at JET?

Mr. Regent : That’s right, the basics at least.

Mr. Abe : So, you learned the basics at JET and honed them at the company?

James is, of course, a foreign national. Later, I had many, many discussions with James himself about how, as his boss, I could make the most of James’s strengths that our Japanese people don’t possess, and how I could leverage James’s career. By that I mean, for most Japanese, when they join a company, their career just kind of happens as they work for the company over many years, but non-Japanese people tend to want to build their own career, and naturally the company wants to support them in that. So I talked to James on many occasions, asking him what he wanted to do.

Of course, one area in which he excelled over Japanese employees is that he has an exceptional ability to analyse things in very fine detail. Based on James’s own wishes, we actually took advantage of the company’s short-term training scheme to send him to Jakarta in Indonesia for six months. James, how did you find that six months?

Mr. Regent : I enjoyed it very much, thank you.

Mr. Abe : Just saying you enjoyed it isn’t enough. Tell us a bit about what you did there.

Mr. Regent : Of course, JET was my first experience of living overseas, so I think that experience helped me to get used to living in Indonesia more quickly and smoothly. Here are some photographs of Indonesia.

Mr. Abe : These photographs are of Indonesia. The one on the left, was that a welcome party or something?

Mr. Regent : It was a welcome lunch.

Mr. Abe : What is the one at top right?

Mr. Regent : That one is of a machinery-related project I assisted with. It was a hydro-electric power generation
project. I went to survey the site with some local employees, and this photograph was taken in the middle of the jungle in Sumatra. In this photograph, a very smelly fruit called a durian had fallen off the tree, and we cut into it and ate it right there on the spot.

Mr. Abe: I see. So you were experiencing the life of a trading house man, weren’t you?

Mr. Regent: That’s right.

Mr. Abe: The photo at bottom right. That’s the resort of Bunaken, isn’t it? That looks like fun.

Mr. Regent: It was fun.

Mr. Abe: I see. Now then, finally, could you tell us a little about what you do now?

Mr. Regent: Currently, I am working in a division called the Controller Section. The name of the division doesn’t really describe what it does, but basically, the machinery-related sales department will bring a project to the Controller Section, and, for example, if it is an acquisition project, we will conduct a simple, preliminary valuation of the target company, do some modelling, and explain the outcomes of the valuations and modelling. Based on that, the sales department will make a decision about whether or not to proceed with the project. That’s the kind of work I do.

Mr. Abe: I see. Thank you very much.

As we have explained in our presentation today, the appeal of JET participants for us at Sojitz is, of course, that they are foreign nationals who not only know the Japanese language and culture, but they also know about the unique ways that business is done in Japan. For this reason, we are very reliant on our JET people. Besides James, we also have four JET alumni here today who work for us, so just to show our audience that it isn’t only James; could I ask you to introduce yourselves briefly?

Ms. Murphy: Good afternoon. My name is Ashley Murphy. I am from Illinois in the United States. I worked as an ALT in the city of Fukui in Fukui Prefecture for five years from 2009, and I joined Sojitz Corporation in 2014.

Mr. Beckerman: Good afternoon. My name is Gabe Beckerman. I am from Connecticut in the United States. I worked in international relations in a town called Nanto in Toyama Prefecture from 2014 to 2016, and I joined
Sojitz Corporation this September.

Mr. Clark : Good afternoon. My name is Denton Clark, from the United States. I joined Sojitz in 2012, but before that, I was an ALT on the JET Programme for three years in a small town in Saitama Prefecture called Satte City.


Mr. Abe : Thank you everyone. We at Sojitz hope to continue to grow with our JET alumni into the future. Thank you very much for your kind attention today.

MC : Thank you very much.