

The Connection Between Vietnamese and My Career



—APU Graduate • Yamada-san's Vietnamese Challenge—

“The foundation of my Vietnamese career lies in my studies at APU”

I'm currently working in Ho Chi Minh in Vietnam, but what kind of work am I doing?
I'm working in an overseas branch of an Organizational and Human Resources Consulting Firm based in Ho Chi Minh. We are still in our startup phase, but while we have mainly been focusing on Japanese companies to build our customer base, we have now entered a phase where we are expanding to include foreign and local

companies. Four of us work in our rented office space in Ho Chi Minh. We have two Vietnamese staff members (one of whom is an expat and an APU graduate) and 2 Japanese expat staff members. In addition, we have one Vietnamese staff member in Hanoi, and we plan to add one more next month.



『My Path to Being Assigned to Vietnam』

—— What led to you being assigned to work in Vietnam?

My company established overseas branches in January of last year. It was a major project, with the aim of establishing branches in 4 areas: Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam, and the Philippines. From January of this year we have also opened additional branches in Indonesia and Hanoi.

At that time, the company sent out an internal recruitment message that said, “We’re looking to expand globally, and we’re looking for people who want to join us.” I filled out the application sheet and gave a presentation to my company, and I was selected. 11 people in total were selected for the overseas expansion, but 5 of those 11 were APU graduates. One of them was sent to Vietnam with me, one was sent to Singapore, and two were sent to Thailand.

—— Did you want to go to Vietnam from the start?

Actually at first I planned to go to the Philippines. I approached the situation with an attitude of “I can go anywhere,” and I had received a job offer from the Philippines. However, due to market issues and other factors, they decided to “bring people to Vietnam,” so I ended up in Vietnam. However, because I had studied Vietnamese at APU, I actually am pretty happy with how things ended up.



(Pictured: The building where Yamada-san's company office is located.)

『Encountering Vietnamese——Language Opened the Door for Me』

—— You studied Vietnamese at APU, right? What led you to start studying Vietnamese?

A big influence was making a good Vietnamese friend. Another reason, honestly, is that I simply lost the “click war” and the only classes left were Thai and Vietnamese, (laughs).

However when I thought about my future, I realized there are few Japanese people

who can speak Vietnamese, so it would be a rare skill. In the end, I took the class because I thought it would become a valuable asset.

— **Did being able to speak Vietnamese give you an advantage during the internal selection process?**

During the audition process, when I spoke about my strengths I didn't focus on "I can speak Vietnamese," but instead on "I am willing to learn minor or local languages." I have Vietnamese colleagues so I can't compete with them in terms of language skill alone, but I think it was more important to show willingness to understand other people.

Speaking to Vietnamese people in Vietnamese is a big step, and even just speaking it a little can help you build relationships. Just saying "Xin chào (hello)" can instantly build closeness. You can even become friends with restaurant staff by saying things are "delicious" and get freebies (laughs).



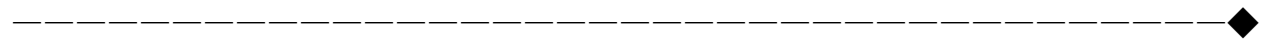
『The Importance of Cultural Understanding—What Lies on the Other Side of Words』

— **What made the biggest impression on you in your Vietnamese classes at APU?**

I think the best thing about Vietnamese classes at APU was that you didn't just learn the language, but that the teacher also taught us about music and V-POP. They taught us "this is popular now," so I was able to use those things to talk with local staff members.

I still don't have a complete understanding of their culture, but because I knew a little about it I was able to have "topics" to discuss, and feel like this was a good way to start communicating.

I really felt that language is not just words, but a doorway to culture.



『Internship Experience in Hanoi—Turning Learning into Practice』

—— **You did an internship in Hanoi in university, didn't you?**

Yes, at the end of my 2nd year I took a one year Leave of Absence and went to Hanoi. At the time I did an internship at a local startup IT company in Hanoi where everyone besides me was Vietnamese. It was an offshore company, so about 80% of the customers were Japanese companies. I worked in my internship as a translator and Bridge SE (Systems Engineer).

—— **Why did you decide to do an internship?**

I wanted to use Vietnamese more, and I thought it wouldn't be very meaningful if I just went to a language school in Vietnam. I chose to do an internship because I wanted to gain experience that could potentially become content for my own creations. This experience is relevant to my current job, and **the chance to experience Vietnamese business culture firsthand was a huge benefit.**



『The Strengths of APU Students——Adaptability and Intercultural Understanding』

—— **As an APU student, what do you think are your strengths when it comes to working overseas?**

I think the strengths of an APU student are adaptability and intercultural understanding. At APU we respect each other's cultures, right? As an extension of that, I think we naturally develop the ability to think "I have to adjust to this environment," and "I have to understand them."

I think being able to think that "nationality doesn't matter" is a huge strength when it comes to intercultural understanding. There are some expats in the world who kind of look down on local people, but I think APU graduates don't really do that – they can meet with others on equal footing.

I think it is very important that people who understand Vietnamese culture are put into management positions. As a business, we are split between sales and consulting. Generally, our local Vietnamese staff members work as consultants, and APU graduates are put in management positions.



(Pictured: Meeting room setup in the office.)

『The Challenge of Establishing a New Base』

—— What are your goals for the future?

Going forward we want to expand even further. I want to work hard so that when we establish new branches, the first name that comes to mind is “Yamada.”

Actually when we established our Hanoi branch, from June to September of last year

I was told to “go and handle it.” I set up the office by myself and built up a customer base, and we were able to officially open in January. I think I was able to handle that kind of experience thanks to the adaptability I cultivated at APU and the foundation I built by studying Vietnamese.

