

## 【Series FUKUBITO】 Eiko Akiyama, Expert of Sales

### Episode 4: What can only I do?

Posted in November 21, 2024

※Original post in Japanese <https://www.fashionsnap.com/article/eiko-akiyama-fukubito04/>



Image by: FASHIONSAP

[Continued from](#) Episode 3

While feeling uneasy atmosphere within the company of CELINE, which became a subsidiary of LVMH, Eiko Akiyama was approached by GIORGIO ARMANI (hereinafter referred to as "ARMANI") to change jobs with her boss because her sales and store management skills were highly evaluated. Akiyama had many customers and could not easily decided, but finally moved to ARMANI. The two of them came from another brand

were suddenly appointed to the top of the store, and they were resented by other staffs. But they soon proved their true abilities and began to lead the team. However, when Akiyama gradually began to feel unsatisfied with overseeing only one store, she was approached by PRADA. —

Eiko Akiyama, a store management consultant who knows thoroughly the keys of sales and serves as Chairman and CEO of BRUSH, looks back on her half-life. **Episode 4 of Series “FUKUBITO” Eiko Akiyama, Expert of Sales.**

## Moved to "ARMANI" and immediately proved true ability

When ARMANI approached me at the opening of a flagship store in Shinsaibashi, I had about 400 customers whose faces and names I recognized at CELINE. I immediately went to a store of ARMANI and looked at the clothes through the window to see if the product would fit my customers. I was convinced that I could confidently introduce products of ARMANI to all my customers, so I took the plunge.

ARMANI is a prestigious brand that also has a Haute Couture line, so when Ms. Tennoji and I joined the store as the store manager and Donna's manager, I remember having a hard time to get used to the brand, such as “the coordination you recommend is not like ARMANI.” However, after all, sales are the job that the ability is the most important. We were able to quickly prove our abilities and win the hearts of other staffs.



Ms. Tennoji (right) and Akiyama at GIORGIO ARMANI(1999)

Image by: Eiko Akiyama

Since many of my clients at CELINE also visited ARMANI, as soon as I joined, sales of the store could be in the top 10 in Japan. I was very grateful that many of the customers I built a trust relationship with at CELINE continued patronage, and through this experience I realized that customers will stay with us if we treat them with sincerity.

However, at that time, ARMANI was in its heyday of Uomo (meaning "men's" or "men's" in Italian). Uomo became popular with famous celebrities, athletes, politicians, and other customers. It was selling at a pace that no other brand could keep up with, and there were many customers with high brand loyalty. On the other hand, Donna was not yet well known or popular and the price was high. So it was not easy to make sales. Moreover, attitude of Ms. Tennoji was exactly the same as when she worked for CELINE. Since there was no compromise on her spartan education, some staff couldn't stand the pressure of her thorough rigor and sales pressure.



With customers at the event of GIORGIO ARMANI (2000)

Image by: Eiko Akiyama

After two years, I was getting more and more frustrated with my days at ARMANI where I was concentrating on one store. When I was working at CELINE, while working as a store manager, I visited stores nationwide with underperforming sales to leverage them. I could

not forget how rewarding it was for me to be involved with many people and to have a positive impact on them. I Just when I was thinking "I want to do that kind of work again," I had an approach from Chieko Aoki, the president of PRADA Japan at the time.

"This is the clothes that women want to wear"

Days of anguish at PRADA, fascinated by its products

Ms. Aoki asked me to guide the staff at all stores and create a "competent store managers" as personnel (human resources department). Back in 2001, although nylon bags were selling explosively at PRADA, clothing wasn't selling as well as it does now. I thought it would be rewarding to train store managers, create customers, and increase sales.

However, when I actually went to see the store, I saw many issues with customer service, and I felt that this was a little different from what I thought. I went to PRADA's office to decline the offer. Since the previous schedule of the president was pushed by about 10 minutes, I waited for her in the showroom. When I picked up the samples lined up there and looked at them, my mind of declining the offer changed suddenly. I was overwhelmed by the quality of Haute Couture. There are PRADA, MIU MIU and PRADA SPORTS\*, and they have everything from clothes to shoes and bags. Moreover, it was very suitable for the times, and I thought, "This is not the clothes that men want women to wear, but the clothes that women want to wear."

\*Casual line of PRADA started in 1997. Since 2018, it has been developed as "PRADA Linea Rossa".



Image by: FASHIONSAP

At the same time that I was genuinely fascinated by the creations, I thought, "in order to sell clothes with such a high sensitivity, I need to improve the customer service skills considerably." That's why I decided to move to PRADA. But to be honest, the three years I spent at PRADA were hard.

At that time, PRADA was in a transitional period, so the company was still chaotic and there was a lot of turnover. In a short period of time, the operating company changed such as F-Miami, IPI Japan and PRADA Japan. Since each company's way of doing things remained, it was difficult to establish a unified operation. Moreover, although I was asked to see all the stores, actually, after the launch of the store in Ginza, I was mainly involved in recruitment interviews, and could hardly train stores and store managers. So maybe the only thing I was able to do at PRADA, it was to create the perfect budgeting chart that I still use today.

When I thought about what only I could do , it was "to manage the store," "to create customers," and "to create staff who can manage the store." I can only make a store successful, and that's what I want to do. So, I decided to leave PRADA. —**Continued in**

## **Episode 5**

Text: Erika Sasaki

Planning & Production: FASHIONSNAPE

### **【Series FUKUBITO】 7 episodes of “Eiko Akiyama, Expert of Sales”**

Episode 1 —” This is the only thing I can do”

Episode 2 —” OK, that's where my life started”

Episode 3 - Intense spartan education at CELINE

Episode 4 – What can only I do?

Episode 5 – Decision in 50s and Transition to Jewelry

Episode 6 – HERMÈS, the memento of client for 40 years

Episode 7 – Aiming to improve the status and value of salespeople