

**OPINION**

Guest Opinion

# AIDS Walk offers opportunity to focus on prevention

Sho Dozono

Azumano Travel is not just my business address; it is part of my family. My responsibility to my family, at home or my office, is to try to set a positive example for them to follow. When my employees wanted to help our schools, or clean up Oregon's beaches, or extend the hand of friendship and support to New York City after Sept. 11, we did it together.

When I was asked by Cascade AIDS Project to join Mayor Vera Katz as an honorary co-chair for the Sept. 20 AIDSWalk03, I thought about the ways in which together we could truly make a difference. I asked several leaders of the business community, "How many employees in your company have HIV/AIDS? Do you even know?"

Although some may think this question is awkward, I felt the occasion of AIDSWalk afforded an opportunity. I know many top executives of our business community as being good, caring individuals. I hoped that through an initial dialog, we could open doors to awareness and comfort about ways to show a new kind of leadership by caring enough to ask if AIDS claimed a place in their workplace.

Maybe we could be the first to talk in our offices that this disease is preventable, and that knowing how to prevent it saves lives. I know that AIDS cases are increasing in the United States, infecting more women, children and people of color. There's no better time for us to talk about HIV/AIDS than now. We shouldn't lose any more lives.

As an AIDSWalk03 honorary co-chair, one of my goals was to ask local corporate leaders to make a public statement I had made within my Azumano family; first by joining me in walking and secondly, by making efforts to become more comfortable in talking about HIV/AIDS within their companies.

Over the years, I've lost four members of my corporate family to AIDS. Losing them made me want to create an open environment of understanding for all we go through in our lives. I want Azumano to be a place where it's okay to talk about our problems and, perhaps, find comfort and solutions.

Big changes within corporate culture are never easy. As CEOs and business owners, we're faced with never-ending sets of new challenges as they relate to our operations, administration and above all, our work force.

Just as we strive to keep our profits and productivity increasing, so should we seek to expand our compassion and creativity to support those who make that possible--our employees. That's why I consider the 250 employees of Azumano Travel my extended family. What happens to them happens to me.

In the very least, I want to create an environment where an employee's not afraid, ashamed or stigmatized from sharing something that impacts their lives, including HIV or AIDS.

Chances are it's only a matter of time before this preventable disease impacts you or your company. It probably already has, or is, only you don't know it.

Walk with me, Mayor Katz, and other corporate leaders on Sept. 20 for AIDSWalk03 to support Cascade AIDS Project and to show there's a commitment to communicate, educate and prevent our employees, and their children, from ever having to be silent victims of HIV/AIDS in the first place.

*Sho Dozono is president and CEO of Azumano Travel.*