

A Sho of generosity

By Claudette Covey

For Sho Dozono, success in the business world comes with a larger responsibility: giving back. "I think in business, you have to be a good corporate citizen," said Dozono, president and CEO of Azumano Travel in Portland, Ore. Dozono, however, doesn't just talk the talk.

To wit: Less than a month after 9/11, Dozono organized the Flight of Freedom, which brought approximately 1,000 Oregonians to Manhattan to help the city, at least metaphorically, get back on its feet.

"My message was we need to get back to the business of business," said Dozono. (He was named ASTA's Travel Agent of the Year in 2002, in large part because of his efforts after 9/11.)

Following the 2004 tsunami that hit southeast Asia, Dozono organized the Flight of Friendship to Phuket, Thailand, to provide the travel industry with an unadorned view of which areas were ready to welcome back tourists.

On a local level, Dozono has been active in his community and is a former chairman emeritus of the Portland Metropolitan Chamber of

Commerce and past president of the Portland Oregon Visitors Association. As a board member of the Portland Schools Foundation, Dozono was instrumental in organizing a March for Our Schools, which raised more than \$11 million to save local teaching jobs.

Dozono had a first career as a social studies teacher before joining his wife's family business in 1976. His father-in-law, George Azumano, founded the agency in 1949. Dozono was named president and CEO in 1987.

Since then, Dozono has been responsible for growing the agency from a small, one-location company to one with an annual sales volume of \$146 million and 175 employees.

The employees, he said, have made the agency successful. Until recently, Dozono has conducted every job interview, from receptionists on up, spending two to three hours with each candidate. When hiring, Dozono said he focuses on a prospective employee's attitude more than than skill sets.

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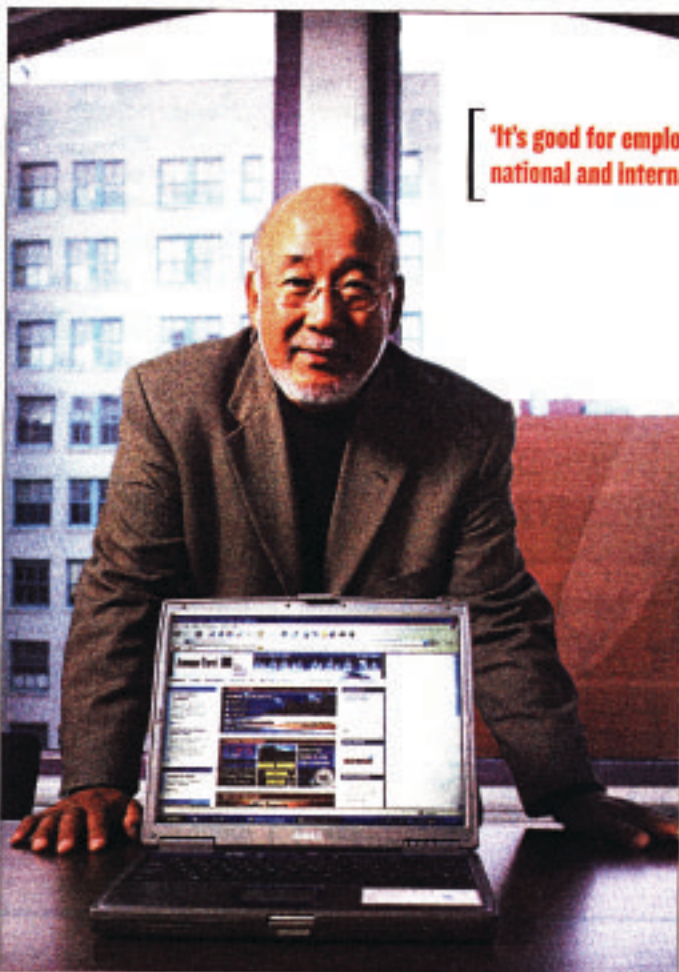
"I always felt I could teach skills," he said, "but I couldn't teach the inner attitude. For instance, if an employee had complaints about a manager, how would they solve that problem, rather than becoming the problem?"

The philosophy has paid off, and the agency has had kept a core of employees for a good 20 years, Dozono said.

Azumano's staff share Dozono's commitment to community service. "It's a part of our corporate culture," he said.

Also part of the Azumano culture is the concept of engagement in the broader travel industry community. "We're in a small market in Portland, and I didn't want to be on the outside looking in," Dozono said. "It's good for employees to know the agency is engaged on local, national and international levels. Connectivity is important."

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Azumano Travel CEO Sho Dozono is a civic leader and philanthropist as well as a businessman.

PHOTO BY JEFFREY HARRIS FOR TRAVEL WEEKLY

Dozono sits on boards of several travel companies and is active in an array of travel associations, all which work toward keeping Azumano and its employees in touch with colleagues.

For the last five years, Azumano has been affiliated with the American Express Travel Agency Representative Network. The affiliation, said Dozono, provides the agency with another way to be involved on a national and global level.

Dozono also believes business diversification is an important element in the agency's success. Eighty percent of Azumano's business comes from corporate travel and 20% from leisure.

Azumano has an air consolidator subsidiary, Premier Gateway, which wholesales international airline tickets to travel agencies nationwide.

And Azumano International provides inbound services to Japanese travelers and is the licensed travel partner of the Seattle Mariners Major League Baseball team, bringing Japanese baseball fans to Mariners' games.

The agency's charitable efforts, meanwhile, continue unabated. Azumano has responded in an unusual way to the plight of New Orleans citizens affected by Hurricane Katrina.

It worked in partnership with the Portland Jazz Festival to bring musicians displaced by Katrina to live and work in the Portland area.

Dozono said 38 musicians have come and gone, and that 16 are looking to stay in the Portland area.

Dozono said his and the agency's charitable efforts are simply a matter of reaping what you sow.

"We've been able to be successful in business, and this is my way of giving back," he said.