



I'm Fine!

The young women who are here training as woodblock printers are - for the most part - working out pretty well. Their skills have been developing steadily, and they are now, in varying degree, contributing to the actual production of prints for sale.

I say 'in varying degree' because the four of them display clear differences in their abilities, over and above what one would expect from the differences in the lengths of time that they have been training here.

One will be very rhythmical in her work - moving steadily right through a batch of prints without much variance at all, while another will fuss over this and that detail, never really getting down to a regular flow. Hearing that, you may assume that the first one is the better printer, but the downside to her approach is that when things go wrong, she may not notice it, leading to a spoiled batch of prints, while the other lady will catch every error before it can balloon into a larger problem.

There is indeed no single approach that can be labelled 'best', and all I can expect of them is that they learn to manage the ins and outs of this work in a way that suits their own abilities.

One thing I myself am struggling with somewhat is the question of discipline. Don't misunderstand - everybody here is very well-behaved and nobody is causing trouble; I am talking about work habits. To take one example, our baren - the circular printing tool - sits on an oiled pad while in use. When taking a break for any period more than a minute or two, the baren should be flipped over onto its 'back', to avoid becoming saturated with the oil, which leads to a loose wrapper and earlier degradation of the inner coil. It's a small detail, but an important one.

And one of the ladies is persistently unable (or unwilling!) to remember to do this. It has become almost a joke that it is necessary for Dave to take a break from eating his lunch pie, walk over to her bench, and - while looking back pointedly at her - flip the baren over to its 'rest' position. She apologizes, but the next day, there we are again ...

Other examples of 'misbehaviour' are such things as: leaving woodblocks scattered here and there around the bench when not in use (if they were to be 'dinged' accidentally, they would become unusable!), putting a baren with a worn cover back into the storage drawer after using it (thus forcing the *next* person to be the one who has to change it), and always grabbing a fresh bowl for mixing pigments instead of seeing if there is one in the cupboard already filled with a similar tone that could be used.

The fundamental 'problem' with all these things is that the workshop master, me, is simply too easy-going. I can never raise my voice to these women, and the idea that I would explode in anger with one of them is simply inconceivable. So the inevitable result is a gradual erosion of discipline, and I'm honestly not quite sure how to handle this moving forward.

I'm wondering if perhaps a system of fines would work. Perhaps we should have a 'Price List' posted on the wall: failure to turn over the baren - 500 yen; failure to re-tie the cover - 1000 yen. All fines are doubled automatically if the webcam is running, thus exposing the 'shame' to the outer world!

And for the ultimate unacceptable behaviour - dropping one's baren on the floor (!) - we would need a fine of at least 10,000 yen, I think.

Yes, the more I think about this idea, the more I like it. Come next payday, instead of my paying *them*, the flow of cash will almost certainly be in the other direction!

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