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**At 82, she coded an app: She just wanted a game she could win**

By Christian Science Monitor, adapted by Newsela staff

Published: 03/22/2022

Even in this age of smartphones, Wakamiya Masako feels older people in Japan are kept out of the tech loop.

Wakamiya, who is in her 80s, used to work in banking, but retired about 25 years ago. Since then, she has spent a lot of her time helping older friends and neighbors learn to use smartphones. She's developed the theory that they have a hard time using the devices because there aren't games and apps aimed at their age group.

One possible solution, she thought, was to create a gaming app to encourage and enchant older people into more comfort with their smartphones.

"My friends were very much looking forward to such an app and encouraged me," says Wakamiya.

So she got some help from an expert, and her idea has made her famous at home and abroad for being one of the oldest app developers in the world. She has been hailed by Japanese leaders and global technology executives for overcoming age barriers.

"Ms. Wakamiya asked me to develop a gaming app in which seniors can beat young people," recalls Koizumi Katsushiro. He is the president of Tesseract, a company that teaches app development.

But he suggested she create the app herself, and that he would help her. Wakamiya took on the challenge and struggled for six months to create the game.

"It was especially very difficult to organize the whole structure of the app," she says of the challenge of learning to code.

In 2017, at the age of 82, she launched Hinadan. The game features Japan's traditional Hinamatsuri festival, a celebration of Girls' Day. On the Hinadan app, which takes its name from a multi-leveled stand for displaying traditional Japanese dolls, users must move dolls into appropriate positions according to roles — the emperor and the empress, court ladies and court musicians with instruments. The puzzle-like game has now been released in five languages.

"I was pleased with the launch, but I did not think it was such a major achievement," says Wakamiya, who has been surprised at the global interest in her work.

Hailing her as the world's oldest app developer, Apple chief executive Tim Cook invited her to the company's Worldwide Developers Conference in San Jose, California, in 2017. "The CEO hugged me!" recalls Wakamiya, blushing because Cook's enthusiasm for her achievement broke Japanese custom. (Japanese people traditionally do not hug.)

Wakamiya soon found herself on the global speaking circuit encouraging older people to overcome discomfort with technology.

**Excel Art**

In 2018, she delivered a keynote address at a United Nations (U.N.) conference in New York on "Why are digital skills critical for older persons?" She has published several books on aging and technology in Japan, including one entitled "Life Becomes More and More Interesting After 60."

"Masako is an inspiration to all people, but especially to those individuals who want to live a long, rewarding and purposeful life," says Bradley Schurman, who ran the 2018 U.N. event at which Wakamiya spoke. "She has shown the world that curiosity does not need to wane in later life."

Wakamiya began using computers a few years before she retired in 1997 in hopes of socializing online while looking after her aging mother at home. She says she found that, more than just a new way to expand her circle of friends, computer literacy enriched her life. It gave her new opportunities to broaden her perspective and satisfy her intellectual curiosity.

The lack of online material for older people made her get creative. Using Excel spreadsheets, she saw patterns that she translated into art — designs for fabric and paper fans, which she calls "Excel art."

"Excel looks difficult for seniors. But I came up with an idea of drawing designs using its functions. Then, I got so excited as I was able to produce one new pattern after another," said Wakamiya, who was wearing an orange-and-green checkered shirt she designed herself using Excel.

Wakamiya says computers made her become artistic where she was not before. She has since has taught other seniors how to produce artworks online, using the Excel software as a design tool. "It's very important for seniors to be creative and produce something original," she says.

**Tech Evangelism**

Wakamiya is a member of Japanese Prime Minister Kishida Fumio's digital policy committee. She is known as an information technology evangelist, whose mission is to get seniors to acquire digital skills. Wakamiya is a member of Japanese Prime Minister Kishida Fumio's digital policy committee. She is known as an information technology evangelist, whose mission is to get seniors to acquire digital skills.

Many older women note Wakamiya's uplifting effect. Hashimoto Kayoko, retired from her career at a major trading house, stumbled upon Wakamiya at an Apple store in Tokyo, where she was giving an inspirational speech.

"It was as though rain in the dark sky suddenly turned to a brilliantly sunny day," she says. Wakamiya "lights up my heart" and "shows me a can-do attitude," she added.

Wakamiya, who lectures across Japan, encourages older people to be involved in volunteer work because many, particularly men, do not know what they are going to do in their post-retirement life. "While you contribute to society, … your perspective [can be broadened] by meeting and working with those in different age groups," she says of volunteering.

**Breaking Age Stereotypes**

"Older populations have many contributions to make to society, and they can play a big role as innovators, investors and consumers in the economy, too," says Schurman. "Masako is helping to break age stereotypes."

Wakamiya says she realized that often, in Japan's culture of perfectionism, many people are simply so afraid of failure they won't try something new. "You should not worry about failures — there are no such things as failures," she says. "To just start something new is deemed a success because you still learn in the process."

**Questions:**

* **What is the main idea of this article?**
* **What a short, 5-6 line summary of this article.**
* **Using evidence from this text, explain why you think the author wrote this article.**
* **Why does the author conclude the article with Wakamiya Masako’s thoughts about trying new things**?