

sustainable japan

ESG promotional content produced by The Japan Times Cube

Principal Trista Bridges shows feasibility and value to shift mindsets Read the Air guides firms to sustainable ways

Name: Trista Bridges
Title: Principal and co-founder of Read the Air and co-author of "Leading Sustainably"
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Hometown: New Jersey
Years in Japan: 6

Leaders & Readers

JOE MUNTAL
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As countries around the world pledge to reduce or offset carbon emissions, companies are under pressure to align their operational models with government policy and investor expectations. Organizational change is not a simple task, however, and often it is the largest, most consequential companies that have trouble changing trajectory.

This is a problem, because society does not have the luxury of time in the pursuit of a sustainable future. As the effects of climate change and ecological destruction grow more pronounced every year, it is critical that businesses reassess their environmental footprint and impact on society.

Trista Bridges, cofounder and principal of Read the Air — a business advisory coalition that helps organizations formulate solutions to sustainable business and operational needs — understands the urgency of sustainability. However, as a business strategist with a prolific career spanning several countries — including the U.S., the U.K. and France — she also understands that companies do not change overnight. "Companies are comprised of a system of people — in some cases

hundreds of thousands of people — and everybody has vested interests," she said during an interview with The Japan Times. "My role as a sustainable business strategist is to help guide them through the process."

The mission of Bridges and her coalition, she said, is to "instill the belief that sustainable business models are feasible and can bring value to all stakeholders." She noted that demand for her coalition's sustainable business services is on the rise, citing two primary factors: Japan's pledged goal to reach carbon neutrality by 2050 and global investors' concerns regarding sustainability issues. "Japan is currently looking externally for growth and capital," Bridges said, "and investors outside Japan are generally concerned with sustainability-oriented topics, including carbon footprinting, SDGs, and diversity, equity, and inclusion."

Before co-founding Read the Air in 2018, Bridges worked as a general business strategist in a wide range of sectors, including pharmaceutical products, financial services and boutique products. As an undergrad and MBA student at the University of Pennsylvania and Northwestern University, respectively, she studied consumer behavior and marketing strategy. After completing her studies, she worked for the strategy consulting group Monitor Group (now Monitor Deloitte), where she advised prominent multinationals such as Coca-Cola and Cadbury Schweppes (now owned by Mondelez). In 2006, she joined Thomson Reuters, where she focused on strategy and business planning in financial services.

Bridges' experience in financial services profoundly affected her perspective on the relationship between business and society.

She joined the field just before the financial crisis of 2007-2008, during which time she witnessed how short-sighted business decisions led to global economic catastrophe. "This event really sparked my interest in how companies affect the world," she said. "Generally, when companies make bad decisions that affect the world, there is fallout, though it may not occur right away. We may be currently experiencing the consequences of decisions that were made a decade ago."

These observations surrounding businesses' social responsibility served as the impetus for Read the Air, the name of which is a literal translation of the Japanese expression "kuki o yomu." Bridges explained, "The name is inspired by the Japanese concept of having the ability to read a room and take account of what's going on in your surroundings." Drawing from this concept, Bridges and her colleagues collaborate with companies to formulate sustainable business models "that minimize negative impacts on society, including all stakeholders in the broad context — consumers, customers, partners and governments — and also produce positive, innovative products that aren't depletive."

Bridges noted a recent uptick in interest in sustainable initiatives among businesses. She cited the influence of ESGs — environmental social and governance criteria for business operations — which, as countries around the world pledge to hit certain sustainability targets, are garnering significant attention from investors. "At first, companies — especially larger companies — saw ESG disclosures as a kind of PR opportunity," she said. "But what has happened over time is that, because we have



HIROMICHI MATONO

Wide fields, French literature and wine

Trista Bridges is principal and co-founder of Read the Air.

Before moving to Japan in 2015, Trista Bridges worked as a business strategy consultant and leader in a wide range of fields, including financial services, pharmaceuticals, media technology, and consumer products. In addition to her roles at Read the Air, she also serves as principal of the consulting firm CapSys Group and as a member of the Tokyo American Club's board of governors.

Bridges grew up in New Jersey and received her first passport when she was 24 years old. She has since spent the majority of her career overseas in the U.K., France and now Japan. Her move to Tokyo follows 12 years of life in Paris, which she considers her "adopted" home.

Fluent in French, Bridges enjoys reading French literature and discovering novels through her book club. She is also a wine connoisseur, taking pleasure in learning about the connections between wine and regional culture.

Perhaps the biggest hindrance to sustainable business models, however, is society's attitude toward convenience and consumption. Convincing society to accept the notion of consuming less, amid an economic paradigm where people have grown accustomed to procuring products at the click of a button, is a formidable endeavor. But Bridges pointed to several examples of successful repurposing business models from which Japan can learn. These include the French secondhand site Vestiaire Collective, which recently raised its valuation to \$1.7 billion through a fundraising round — to which a SoftBank private equity fund invested \$209 million — as well as the French refurbished electronics startup Back Market.

"You only have to visit Akihabara to see that Japan is very good at repairing and repurposing products," Bridges noted. "This is a space where Japan can do a lot better, because they're already doing it."

all these commitments we need to hit, there is increased scrutiny over what companies are reporting and whether they're actually following through with their commitments."

In Japan, obstacles to sustainable business initiatives partially stem from the corporate community's lack of a sense of urgency to change, Bridges said. "Companies in Japa-

nese society are stalwarts of society. They're massive and employ a lot of people, and haven't been challenged like they have been in Western countries, where a lot of people who come out of school want to work for startups or be independent. The perception of companies and their place in society is much stronger here, which is why they might not feel the urgency to change."

Chimikepp Hotel

Michelin-starred modern French cuisine deep in the mountains of Hokkaido



ROBBIE SWINNERTON
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Surrounded by thick forest, Chimikepp Hotel lies deep in the mountains of eastern Hokkaido overlooking the unspoiled waters of Lake Chimikeppu.

Some visitors make their way there for the winter snowscapes, the summer outdoor activities or just to breathe good clean air; others because they know they will dine remarkably well.

While the accommodations look typical of many a back-country inn, the hotel dining room serves cuisine that sets it apart. For this, all plaudits are due to chef Masaki Watanabe.

A native of Shizuoka, he only arrived in Hokkaido by happenstance. He had trained and worked in France and then landed jobs in California, first at the three-Michelin-starred French Laundry and then at Benu in San Francisco (now also with three stars, but at the time a hot newcomer). While waiting to renew his U.S. visa in 2012, he came up to Chimikepp to help out and was bowled over by the setting.

Before long he had taken over the hotel kitchen and revamped the menu. Out went the tired if ubiquitous Continental cuisine. In came seasonal local produce.



He sources fish, scallops, urchins and shrimp from the nearby Sea of Okhotsk. He buys beef and pork from local small-scale farmers. And he only has to step outside the hotel to find cep mushrooms growing wild in summer.

And then there are fowl and other game

NAOMICHI SUZUKI
HOKKAIDO GOV.



We are delighted that Chimikepp Hotel was selected to be part of the "Japan Times Destination Restaurants, 2021." The hotel is located in the Okhotsk region of Eastern Hokkaido; an area rich with nature where primeval forest grows thickly. The region boasts ingredients of world-class quality, nurtured in this abundant natural setting.

We would like to invite you to come to Hokkaido and enjoy chef Masaki Watanabe's cuisine, which lavishly uses the seasonal ingredients of Okhotsk, while enjoying the pristine nature by the shore of Lake Chimikeppu.



Address
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204 Numasawa, Tsubetsu-cho, Abashirigun, Hokkaido 092-0358, Japan
<https://www.chimikepphotel.com/>

TAICHI SATO
MAYOR OF TSUBETSU



We are very honored that the restaurant in Chimikepp Hotel in the town of Tsubetsu was selected for the "Destination Restaurant 2021, authentic Japan selection" list for people from around the world, chosen by Japanese people."

The inn is located on the shore of the ancient Lake Chimikeppu. Our friendly chef Masaki Watanabe uses local ingredients to create exquisite cuisine.

We hope you will enjoy the delicious cuisine while listening to the calls of wild birds by the serene surface of the lake. We look forward to seeing you soon.

125 years

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Times Capsule

Vol. 6: Lacquer

Lacquer artisans add layers to 1,000 years of tradition

A craft preserved from ancient times, lacquering is one of Japan's representative arts, so much so that "japanning" became a word in English for similar lacquerwork. In 1955, the artisan Otomaru Kodo was designated by the government as a "preserver of an important intangible cultural property," making him a living national treasure, in recognition of his contribution to further developing the craft with a technique of building colored layers and carving through them to create fascinating designs. Lacquering techniques have been handed down from generation to generation over more than a thousand years, producing numerous creative works of high artistic value.

Like so many traditional crafts, the art of lacquering requires an enormous amount of patience and perseverance.



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Brand history & Archives
<https://sustainable.japantimes.com/brandhistory>



Otomaru Kodo at work: Japan Illustrated, 1968, Vol. 1 No. 1

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Visit to Home of U.S. Consul, Former Authority of Shique

Monday, May 20, 1940: THE JAPAN TIMES & MAIL

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