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Giles Duke plans to expand Lifeline, needed now more than ever

From music industry leader to director of TELL

Name: Giles Duke

Title: Executive Director, TELL Japan
URL: www.telljp.com
Birthplace: Chile
Years in Japan: 50

Leaders & Readers

TIMOTHY SCHULTZ
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Giles Duke's first experience with the music industry of Japan occurred when he was a teenager living in Tokyo, back in 1972. His father was cultural attache at the British Embassy and made the controversial decision to deny the visas of a certain U.K. rock band. Giles laughs about it now. "Me and my friends weren't very happy with him — we loved that band!"

The brush with fame must have left an impression on the quiet diplomat's son. When Giles returned to Tokyo as an ambitious, bilingual young adult, he began working with Japanese music labels. It was the start of a 30-year career that included running music labels, leading commercial label departments, writing music and organizing stadium tours in Japan of the biggest Western stars. Now in his middle age, Giles has every appearance of a respectable senior executive. But get him talking and the stories will come: from writing hit lyrics with Haruomi Hosono to arranging the visits (and dining companions) of many famous international rock stars, here is a man who has literally done it all.

In 2021, Giles took on a new challenge: as the executive director of TELL, Tokyo's

premier English-language counseling and support resource. Moving from the music industry to a vital nonprofit organization has been both invigorating and challenging. "The music industry is a people business, in that you need to help and enable the artists," he said. "Here at TELL, we have about 15 core staffers, about 40 contracted therapists and over a hundred and thirty volunteers. The scale is greater, but so is the critical nature of the work here, and that's what makes it so rewarding." To foreigners living in Tokyo, the presence of TELL can literally be lifesaving. Japan has one of the highest suicide rates of any industrial country, with an average of 58 people taking their own lives every day. While there are no official police statistics by race or nationality, it is estimated that one person out of those 58 is a non-Japanese individual.

As a longtime resident of Japan, the mental health stresses of living here is personal to Giles.

"I remember being here as a young man in my 20s, feeling isolated or quite depressed. TELL was actually around back then, but it was smaller, and I hadn't heard of it. Back then, you couldn't even call home very easily — think of the phone charges! The only therapy I knew about was talking with mates in bars or drinking by oneself. Which could lead to very dark days." Japan's first national suicide hotline, Inochi no Denwa (Life Phone), was established in 1971. Seeing the success of that effort, missionaries, churches, community members and others came together to create a telephone lifeline service in English, taking their first calls in April of 1973. Citing the suicide statistics of Japan, Giles expressed a humble awe at the

impact that 49 years of TELL's Lifeline must have had. "How many lives have been saved every year? It's not a number that can be known."

While the Lifeline remains the core of TELL's mission, TELL's counseling services have expanded to provide individual, family and corporate support. Last year TELL's therapists supported over 1,903 people during 14,000 sessions. These sessions included one-on-one therapy, marriage support, childhood and adolescent counseling and grief counseling. Many of these sessions occurred in Okinawa, where TELL works hand-in-hand with the U.S. military to support service members and their families. In Tokyo, the cost of individual and family counseling is subsidized by TELL's work with corporations, which can now contract with TELL to support employees who speak English or Japanese through individual sessions or group training. Giles is proud of this new effort. "This new trend of providing mental health support to employees is a great change. Companies are simply getting smarter. By supporting their employees, companies improve their performance. The days of stigma or shame are finally fading."

With TELL's 50th anniversary coming next year, Giles is determined to cap the milestone with a major goal: making the TELL Lifeline closer to a 24-hour service. The Lifeline is staffed entirely by trained volunteers, called support workers. Those interested in joining the effort go through training before taking calls, which support workers can take from their own homes. There are five shifts per day, and include both voice and chat support. While most callers do not mention self-harm, some are indeed on



HIROMICHI MATONO

the brink. With the closed borders and economic slowdown of the pandemic, this year saw a 33% increase in suicide protocol. The need for the Lifeline has never been greater. "We simply don't know who has tried

to call or wanted to call the Lifeline during off-hours. But to think of someone falling deeper into despair or distress because we were not open is quite frustrating." Expanding the five shifts to cover 24 hours will

School, marketing, real estate, music

Giles Duke grew up all over the world as the son of a diplomat for the United Kingdom. He spent his junior high and high school years in Tokyo, where he attended Nishi-Machi school and then Yokohama International School, before going to the U.K. for his higher education.

After finishing higher education he returned to Tokyo, working with famous Japanese musicians before working in marketing and real estate and entering the music industry for a second time. Starting at Sony Music Entertainment, Giles held leadership positions in corporate planning, merchandising and human resources for Sony, EMI and Universal Music Group. In 2021 he began leading TELL as executive director.

Music and book lover, Giles likes to do some light gardening when time allows.

require an increase of volunteers and funding, which the new leader of TELL is determined to find. "Some of the support workers I've met — the very passionate ones — were people who had once called the Lifeline during a moment of crisis. They volunteer now so that they can do for others what was once done for them. It's those kinds of stories that make working at TELL so incredibly rewarding. And I hope that anyone reading this, who feels that they have some capacity to help, might decide to reach out and become a support worker."

The former music executive paused then, and smiled at his own passion. "Sorry," he said. "It's just such an incredible organization. I tend to go on about it." But there was no apology needed. After a 30-year adventure in the music industry, Giles Duke is working on something bigger. It might be his greatest hit yet.

If you would like to become a Lifeline support worker, visit www.telljp.com/lifeline/pctraining for more details on their next training.

JapanCraft21: Revitalizing master crafts for the new century

ESG/SDGs

K. NISHI
JAPANCRAFT21 STAFF

Steve Beigel, who first arrived in Japan in 1971, recalls his initial impressions of the country's craft culture, saying, "I entered my new apartment with its tatami mats, shoji window shades, futon bed, Hagi teapot, lacquer bowls and a drawer filled with handmade wooden and bamboo gadgets, whisks and brushes — and I felt like I'd been transported to a magical kingdom of handmade master artisan crafts." Since then, Beigel has appreciated the countless ways that his life has been enriched by the finely crafted items he uses every day. "Coming from suburban Los Angeles and having little exposure to true craftsmanship, I marveled at the breadth and depth of Japanese ceramics, lacquerware, weaving, dyeing, metalwork, bamboo masterworks and carpentry — artistry that is among the most developed in the world."

When Japan ended 250 years of self-imposed isolation in the 1800s, it astounded the world with the depth and enormity of its craft tradition, and Beigel reflects on how many of those traditions were still alive in 1971, supported by vibrant craft communities. In recent decades, however, he has watched Japanese craft culture deteriorate at an alarming rate. Machine-printed kimono flood in from offshore while local master weavers, dyers and embroiderers struggle to survive; sales of lacquerware are plummeting; few young people are capable of replacing the now-retiring bamboo basket artists; wood joinery is no longer taught to young carpenters. The list goes on. Though tens of thousands of master craftspeople still function, most are near or past retirement

age and few young people are taking over. In 1979, there were about 500,000 highly skilled craftspeople in Japan; today, there are about 50,000. Also disappearing are craft support specialists such as unique tool makers, dye blenders, brush makers, stencil cutters, etc., all of whom form a highly interdependent network in the craft community.

Despite this alarming trend, the craft world in Japan is still in a better state than most of the world. "But," warned Beigel, "time is running out. In a world of click, use and discard, this is one of the last places where you can buy moderately priced daily-use items that are sustainable, eco-friendly and of exceptional quality based on centuries of trial and error."

The causes for the decline are complex. Demand for crafts decreases as Japan's craft-supporting cultural institutions also decline. Buddhism is losing support as the public utilizes the corporate funeral industry. Where it was once common to see Japanese company presidents supporting the tea ceremony, many now turn to Western pastimes such as golf. Artisanal housing built by master carpenters faces crushing competition from factory-style construction. The advertising budgets of huge clothing brands crowd out traditional weavers and dyers.

Four years ago, Beigel decided to take action: "I gathered a few like-minded friends together and started JapanCraft21, an organization whose aim is to revitalize traditional Japanese master crafts by identifying the issues artisans face and implementing solutions for the 21st century." For their first project, JapanCraft21 focused on high-level wood joinery. Working with Tomohiro Naito (president of Naito Komuten), a fifth-generation Kyoto master carpenter, they helped form Shishokai, an NPO made up of traditional building masters, and helped

establish a small school for young working carpenters that offered intensive, free-of-charge, weekend joinery classes. "We recently graduated our first class of six — the first generation of young people in decades who are capable of



From left: Sculptor Kan Yasuda, JapanCraft21 Founding Director Steve Beigel and Ronnie Prize winner, Takuya Tsutsumi JAPANCRAFT21

building a wooden house entirely without nails." This year they are training six new students in wood joinery, as well as five young plasterers in Japanese bamboo mud wall construction. An advanced Japanese garden technique course for five young gardeners began just this month.

After establishing the school, JapanCraft21 decided to integrate a new approach into its revitalization efforts. Together with the Asia Society (Japan Center), a highly respected international cultural institution, JapanCraft21 co-sponsors a series of Japan Traditional Craft Revitalization Contests. Beigel said: "We let the applicants identify both problems and solutions. By selecting and funding exceptional individuals with talent, track records and passion for revitalizing crafts in the 21st century, the contests help reverse the decline in craft culture." The first-place Ronnie Prize winner is awarded ¥5 million (\$40,000) in targeted funding to be applied toward achieving their vision, as well as the active support of a mentor group of experts in fields such as business, design, product development, information technology and marketing. All 10 finalists are also provided with a broad and significant support package.

The crafts of Japan have inspired the world for more than 150 years and belong to all of us. JapanCraft21 is funded by lovers of Japanese crafts both in and outside of Japan. "We are showing that even a small private organization can make a difference," Beigel said. "We offer our members an opportunity to be active supporters of the Japanese craft community, to do something worthwhile that benefits us all."



Bond Project builds safety network for troubled youths

ESG/SDGs

MAIKO MURAOKA
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Jun Tachibana saw youths on the street as possible interviewees for a free paper, titled Voices, that focuses on how young people with various problems live, think, search for ways of expression and connect with other people. She had been involved in the publication of Voices as an editor-in-chief since its launch in 2005, but an encounter with a girl in Shibuya drove Tachibana to engage deeper with at-risk youths.

"She was still very young and looked like a runaway girl, wandering around at night as if she had nowhere to go, easy prey for someone who might be out there to pick up a girl on the street," Tachibana said. "I just couldn't leave her there, so I asked her if she wanted to come and stay the night at my place."

At least the girl slept one night in a safe haven, but Tachibana learned how easy it is to lose track of someone like this girl. Many like her have no home, or they have reasons not to go home. "Cellphones are the only means of communication, but many of the kids are broke and cannot continue to pay their bills," Tachibana said. She and the girl lost communication, and when they ran into each other on the street again some time later, the girl was pregnant and Tachibana was in a middle of a patrol activity that she had started since her encounter with the girl.

The girl needed help again. The father of the baby was unknown, and she did

not have a delivery reservation at any hospital. Tachibana helped her make an appointment at a women's consulting center to get necessary advice for her prenatal and postnatal life, but she did not show up. Tachibana, who had promised to attend the consultation with her, talked with the consultant on her own, hoping to later get a chance to relay necessary information to the girl.

Tachibana pointed out that these girls may have urgent troubles at any time of the day, and it is difficult for them to make any kind of promises and plans because of their unstable lives, while government organizations have office hours. Bond Project, a nonprofit that Tachibana established in Tokyo in 2009, functions, as its name suggests, to link at-risk girls with municipalities and support organizations while serving as a support organization itself.

In addition to reaching out to youths on the street, Bond Project has been reinforcing its online patrol activities, especially after a serial murder case in Zama, Kanagawa Prefecture, that shocked the nation in 2017. The killer, Takahiro Shiraiishi, strangled and dismembered eight females and one male ranging in age from 15 to 26 in a period of a few months. Shiraiishi and the victims reportedly had become acquainted on social media.

Tachibana attended his trial several times and sent letters to him asking for an interview. After the second letter, Shiraiishi accepted and they spoke face-to-face. Among the many things she learned in the interview were two important pieces of information. First, there are many communities that consist of troubled young

women and men who try to prey on them on social media. Second, the victims may have chosen to meet Shiraiishi instead of the many other men because he adjusted his tone to match each of the victims and offered to meet their requests.

"I don't mean to say that social networking services are bad. I just want these girls to be found by us before they are found by people with evil intentions," Tachibana said, stressing that it is easy to make a wrong judgment about whom to trust when one is desperate.

The online patrol also enables Bond Project to reach out to youths all across Japan, which is an important first step. But to provide the actual support they need, a nationwide network of support organizations is necessary. The Fish Family Foundation, which had given a Champion of Change Japan Award to Tachibana in 2018, offered a grant to Bond Project last year to conduct a survey and interviews on dozens of private support organizations across Japan.

The results of the research, which revealed that funding, human resources and successors were lacking at the organizations, were submitted to the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare in the form of a proposal for better assistance for both troubled young women and support organizations. This led to a series of online seminars in February and March attended by 400 participants, including national and local government officers and members of nonprofit organizations. Bond Project, with additional financial support from the foundation this year, will engage in projects to build a partnership network of support organizations and a program to share know-how within the network.

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Jun Tachibana



Bond Project staffers talk to girls during outreach in Shibuya. BOND PROJECT



Jun Tachibana carefully listens to a girl on the streets of Shibuya. BOND PROJECT



JapanCraft21 Craft Leader Award recipients for 2021
TAISHI YOKOTSUKA FOR ASIA SOCIETY JAPAN CENTER & JAPANCRAFT21