

The Danger of Making Assumptions

Have you ever had an experience when you did something based on an assumption and it turned out it was wrong? Many years ago, when I was working in a restaurant, a foreign customer came in, and my coworker called me over because I was one of the few workers who spoke English. I asked the customer, “for here or to go?” The person answered in an annoyed way, “持ち帰ります。” It was an awkward moment that I’ll never forget. Although it was not my intention, I upset someone because I had no doubt that a foreign customer wouldn’t be able to speak Japanese. Now I am working at a rental car company most of whose customers are people from foreign countries or mainland Japan, but since then, I always try to speak Japanese first to every person.

Like what I did at my work, many of us make assumptions all the time. Sometimes it's about a customer in a restaurant, but other times it's about someone in another country who you have never seen. Last month, I joined a foreign program of Okinawa Christian University and went to the Philippines for the first time. We stayed there for a week. During the program, we visited some slum towns, schools, and we volunteered in missionaries of charity.

In one of the poor towns we visited, we were able to meet and talk with two women who work as prostitutes. It was my first time to meet someone who works in the sex industry. One was a college student who was about the same age as me, and the other one was a mother of three children who was about my mother’s age. The woman who is a student shared her story with us, and we learned that she has to work there because she couldn’t earn enough money from a daytime job to pay her tuition fees. I didn’t expect that I and these women would have things in common. She seemed just like an Okinawan student who works part-time to earn

some money for their education. Before I met them, I didn't expect such an encounter and I believed this kind of person existed only very far away from me. However, having an actual interaction with them changed my way of thinking.

When we had a gubernatorial election last month, I often got disappointed seeing people who support two different candidates fighting online, because both of them were just harassing each other without researching or listening to what the other party says. This happened because both of them believed they were right and the other side was wrong.

In these ways, believing in something without looking it up carefully is extremely dangerous because it could lead to battles, discrimination, or prejudgement. In order to make a better society, it's important to think critically, not take anything for granted, ask questions, listen to people, and think by yourself.