

Eisai CEO more like founding father

When one thinks about the so-called company lifer, one envisions an individual who arrives at the office one day and returns for the next 8,750, to the extent that said individual becomes as much a fixture as the company's physical structures. But while newly appointed chairman and CEO of Eisai Inc. Yuji Matsue fits the definition of a lifer—he went to work at Eisai in 1982, leaving only to get his MBA at Duke University's Fuqua School of Business in the mid-1990s—Matsue's varied responsibilities at the company over the years render him far more a founding father than the stereotypical corporate prole.

He started at Eisai as a marketer, at a time when the company hadn't expanded too far beyond Japan. After stints in business development and planning (and then his overseas education), Matsue returned in a post where he helped chart the company's expansion. "We decided to establish companies in the United States and the UK, Germany and France," he recalls. "When the plan went to the management committee, it was approved. Then it was, 'Okay, Yuji, where do you want to go?'" He headed back to the US, where he was among the first Eisai workers at the US affiliate. "My employee number was five," he says with a chuckle.

Matsue remembers that first North American stay warmly, describing it as a "glorious time." Before departing in 2002—to posts in Europe and Japan—he played pivotal roles in the launches of Eisai mainstays Aricept (Alzheimer's) and AcipHex (heartburn). In Europe, Matsue contributed to efforts to establish three major facilities on the continent; from Japan, he led the company's global PR and investor relations and, ultimately, oversaw subsidiaries in India, China and Korea, among other countries.

His return to the US this April, then, can be viewed as both a homecoming and another adventure. In his current role, he's responsible

Yuji Matsue
Chairman and CEO,
Americas Region, Eisai

2009
VP of global PR/IR, corporate
officer, Eisai Co. Ltd.

2006
SVP of planning and strategy,
Eisai Europe Ltd.

for the company's Americas region. But when asked what he brings to the job from his prior Eisai roles, he defers and strikes a cautious note: "Any time there are changes, there's a little anxiety." He refers to a favorite quote, one uttered by a character named Socrates in Dan Millman's *Way of the Peaceful Warrior*: "The secret of change is to focus all of your energy not on fighting the old, but on building the new."

Which isn't to say that Matsue plans to tiptoe around existing structures and systems. Indeed, his first month in the new job saw him holding court in a series of informal meetings with Eisai employees and at the company's national sales meetings, as well as venturing to Eisai offices in Japan, Mexico and Canada. What did he learn during his get-to-know-you-better jaunt? That despite what he describes as recent "tough times"—the two aforementioned products going off patent—Eisai is poised to assert itself and thrive in the process.

"We had to reshape the operations and organizations, and people were therefore a little exhausted or tired," Matsue acknowledges. "But Eisai became stronger. If you compare it to the last time when I was here, Eisai is definitely stronger."

He was also heartened to see many old friends and colleagues in the crowds during addresses to larger groups of Eisai employees: "One great surprise was that I could find so many familiar faces in the audiences. I left the United States 12 years ago, but so many people like Eisai and are still here."

When discussing the future, Matsue comes off as both cautious and confident. He speaks enthusiastically about three recent launches, including slimming drug Belviiq, and two more on the way, and predicts the company will soon expand in Latin America. And while his out-of-the-office pursuit of choice may be a mostly individual sport—tennis—Matsue thinks the team-first organization that Eisai has become will keep paying dividends.

"[Think of] a symphony orchestra—you can hire good violinists or cello players, but it doesn't mean it's a good orchestra," he says. "The right direction and teamwork are important."

—Larry Dobrow

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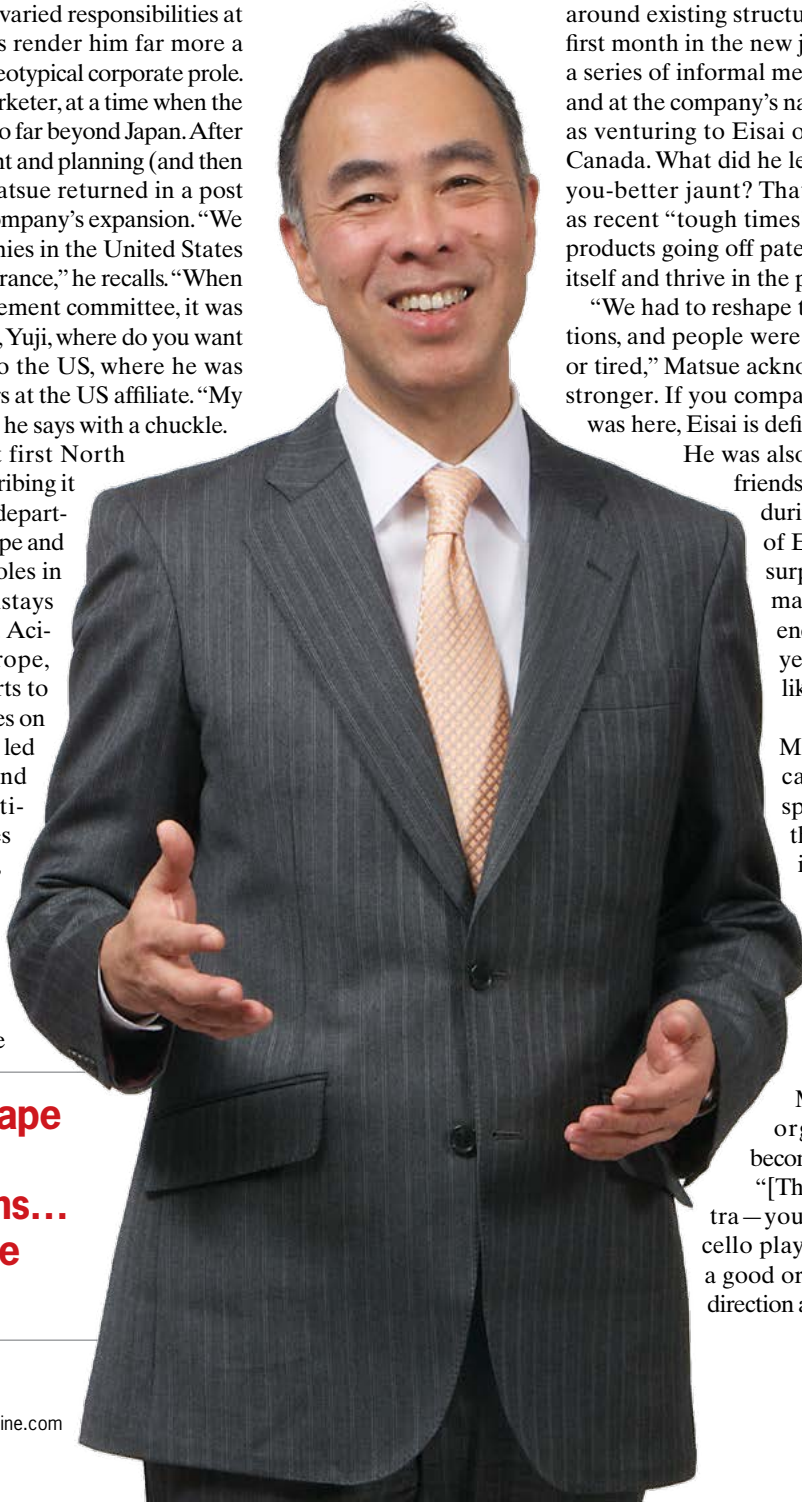


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