

In workaholic Japan, “job leaving agents” help people escape the awkwardness of quitting

By Yuri Kageyama
The Associated Press

TOKYO — In Japan, a nation reputed for loyalty to companies and lifetime employment, people who job-hop are often viewed as quitters. And that’s considered shameful.

Enter *taishoku daiko*, or “job-leaving agents.” Dozens of such services have sprung up in the last several years to help people who simply want out.

“Imagine a messy divorce,” says Yoshihito Hasegawa, who heads Tokyo-based TRK, whose Guardian service last year advised 13,000 people on how to resign from their jobs with minimal hassles.

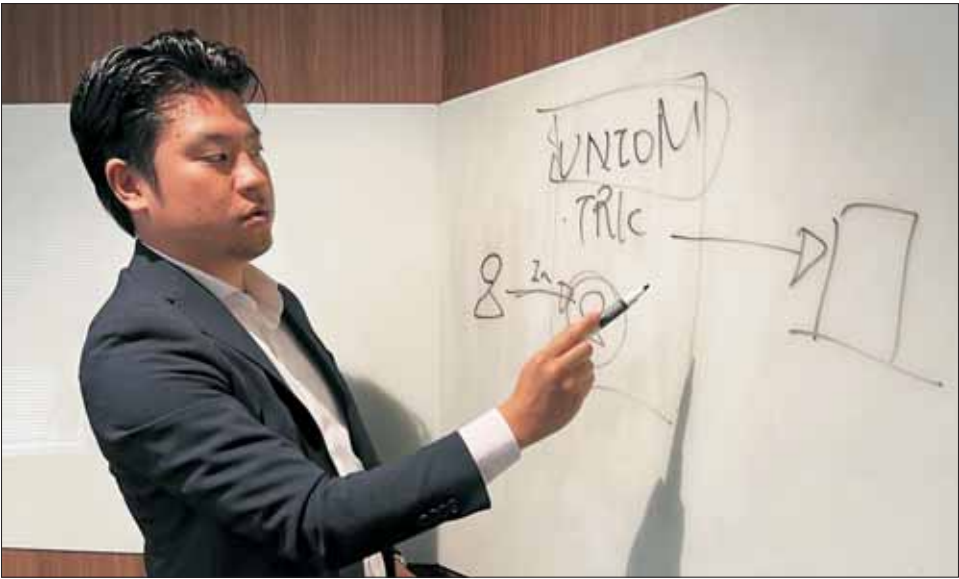
People often stick with jobs even when they’re unhappy, feeling as if they are “kamikaze” sacrificing their lives for the greater good, he said, comparing his clients to pilots sent on suicide missions in the closing days of World War II.

“It’s the way things are done, the same way younger people are taught to honor older people,” he said. “Quitting would be a betrayal.”

Founded in 2020, Guardian, a *taishoku daiko* service, has helped various people, mostly in their 20s and 30s, escape less painfully from jobs they want to quit. That includes people who worked in a Shinto shrine, a dentist’s office, and law firm to convenience store and restaurant staff.

Nearly half of Guardian’s clients are women. Some work for a day or two and then discover promises of pay or work hours were false.

Guardian charges 29,800 yen (\$208) for its service, which includes a three-month membership in a union that will represent



an employee in what can quickly turn into a delicate and awkward negotiation process in Japan.

Generally, Guardian’s clients have worked for the small- and medium-sized businesses that employ most Japanese. Sometimes people working for major companies seek help. In many cases, bosses have a huge say over how things are run and sometimes simply refuse to let a worker leave, especially since many places are shorthanded to begin with, given Japan’s chronic labor shortage.

Japanese law basically guarantees people the right to quit, but some employers used to an old-style hierarchy just can’t accept that someone they have trained would want to walk away. Those tackling the quitting battle who were interviewed for this story used terms like “fanatics,” “bullies,” and “mini-Hitlers” to describe such bosses.

Conformist “workaholic” pressures in Japanese culture are painfully heavy. Workers don’t want to be seen as trouble-makers, are reluctant to question authority, and may be afraid to speak up. They may fear harassment after they quit. Some worry about the opinions of their families or friends.

Although most of Guardian’s clients prefer to be anonymous, a young man who goes by the online name of Twichan sought help after he was criticized for his sales performance and became so depressed he thought about killing himself. With Guardian’s help he was able to quit in 45 minutes.

Taku Yamazaki, who went to a different *taishoku daiko*, said his former employer was a subsidiary of a major IT vendor and he knew his departure would be complicated and time-consuming because he was doing well there.

QUIET QUITTING. Yoshihito Hasegawa, who heads Tokyo-based TRK, whose Guardian service advises people how to resign from their job, shows a diagram to explain what his service does at his office in Tokyo. In Japan, a nation reputed for loyalty to companies and lifetime employment, people who job-hop are often viewed as quitters. Companies such as Guardian have helped various people, mostly in their 20s and 30s, escape less painfully from jobs they want to quit. (AP Photo/Yuri Kageyama)

“I felt a certain amount of gratitude toward the place I was leaving, but I wanted to switch gears mentally and move forward as soon as possible,” he said.

When people fill out *taishoku daiko* online forms, an automated reply comes within minutes, with a more personal reply promised within one working day.

Lawyer Akiko Ozawa, whose law firm advises job-leavers although usually it represents companies, acknowledged it may be hard to believe people can’t just pick up and leave.

“But switching jobs is a major challenge in Japan that requires tremendous courage,” said Ozawa, who has written a book on *taishoku daiko*. Given the shortage of workers in Japan, finding and training replacements is tough and bosses sometimes erupt in outrage when someone resigns.

“As long as this Japanese mindset exists, the need for my job isn’t going away,” said Ozawa, who charges 65,000 yen (\$450) for her service. “If you are so unhappy that you’re starting to feel ill, then you should make that choice to take control over your own life.”

Another quitting service, Albatross, offers a “MoMuri,” or “can’t stand it

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