

A few weeks ago, I was asked to write an essay in English about internationalization. It makes sense, since I've been here for more than three years, that someone would ask me to write an essay on the topic. But when I tried to think of something to say, I had a lot of trouble thinking of a good essay topic. I've had a lot of interesting experiences in Japan, but it wasn't enough just to write about that.

I thought back on all the journals that I have written each week at this center. I tried to think of a topic that I might be able to use to write an essay about internationalization. But when I started to remember the journals I have written at this center, I noticed that so many of my topics were just about things that I have seen or done since I came to Japan. I was still having a hard time thinking of a way to write this essay.

But when I thought back over my journals, I noticed a pattern. My first journals were about a lot of differences between life in America and life in Japan. They often focused on things that were frustrating or troublesome for me. I realized that as time went on, my journals became more positive, and more uniquely about the interesting new experiences I was having, not only the troubles. Not to say that the troubles went away, but my point of view changed. I learned to have a sense of humor about things.

When I first came to Japan, I was concerned about making the right impression or doing the right thing wherever I went. But I started to realize that I would never be able to fit in and a lot of my stress and efforts were in vain. Once I realized this, I could enjoy the interesting experiences I was having so much more. I didn't have to worry about if I was sitting the right way, speaking with the right level of *keigo* or blending in with the people around me. I figured I would never fit in, so it wasn't worth the trouble of worrying about it. I was more comfortable being me and had many more positive experiences because of it.

I learned to have a sense of humor about the mistakes that I made or the things that people said to me. Sometimes people would make comments about my "big size" or would talk about me in Japanese when they thought I couldn't understand (I could). Instead of letting these things upset me, I just let them roll off my back. I laughed about the funny things that happened to me and shared my stories with my friends. I soon noticed that I was having more fun and had fewer complaints.

The most important thing about internationalization that I learned since I came to Japan is that sense of humor is key. If you can't laugh at yourself and the embarrassing situations you might find yourself in, I think it would be hard to get the most out of an international experience. If you go abroad or have some interactions with foreigners in Japan, please remember this important thing!