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YATA Chief Executive Officer
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20

Susanna Wong: quality and flexibility take modern Japanese lifestyle department store to new heights

黄思丽：崇优·灵活——重新诠释日式生活百货

Despite intense competition in the local retail industry, YATA continues to thrive rapidly. Three supermarkets were opened during the year and new stores are being planned for Kwai Fong and North Point. These, together with the Sha Tin store renovation due to complete in late 2018, are expected to bring sustained growth for the company. Chief Executive Officer Susanna Wong says that instead of following others in selling their products at cut prices, she emphasizes flexibility and quality because she believes that is the key to winning in a competitive market.

Industry on the move

Japanese goods are always much sought-after by the people of Hong Kong for their quality and variety. In the 1980s, Japanese department stores were everywhere in the city, but many of them were eventually forced out. So how does YATA, positioned as a modern Japanese lifestyle department store, manage to secure a firm footing in the market? Susanna said: "Japanese department stores used to operate

by gathering a variety of retailers in a large establishment, but times have changed and this approach to department stores was replaced by shopping malls long ago. We must therefore be bold to innovate; take the initiative in understanding customer needs and respond promptly to the changing market. Susanna thinks there is no shortcut to success, the only way is to always observe and listen to customers. "For example, if a

particular candy isn't selling well, you need to ask what has gone wrong? Is it on racks too high for kids to notice, or doesn't it meet consumer tastes? We need our frontline staff to observe and communicate with customers to get this information." As the Chinese idiom goes, 'Speed is the most valuable in war.' and the same applies to the retail industry. "If the situation does not improve after we relocate the product and reduce price, we need to

adjust the quantity and variety of our stock." Susanna thinks that in running a supermarket, one has to be responsive and decisive because many products have a limited shelf life. A product may expire if you do not act quickly enough.

Quality over price

Competition in the retail industry is fierce and price wars among industry players have a direct impact on profit. According to Susanna, YATA's operating strategy is not to engage in price wars but to make greater efforts in sourcing goods that consumers want and which are lacking in the market, so you can attract a group of discerning customers. She said: "Price reductions don't help build customer loyalty. Only by offering unique, quality products will customers have the incentive to make continuous patronage. That said, sometimes when others in the industry launch cut-throat price wars, we have no alternative but to make difficult decisions. All in all, we need to follow the trends and adapt to the changing circumstances."

Online shopping has grown rapidly in recent years. The YATA team recognized this and took steps to meet the challenge. Susanna said: "We don't plan to develop online shopping on a large scale at this stage because of the high logistics costs, but we find that our young customers do have a preference for online shopping so we have a strategic approach to attracting more customers to use our online shopping service, for example by making specific goods exclusively available from YATA's online store."

A flexible, efficient team

In the eyes of Susanna, the success of YATA comes from a team where everyone supports and helps each other and is also self-motivated, and this is evident even in just a frontline employee. When YATA has Shopping Days, Susanna often works together with the frontline staff, usually helping to bag at the cashier because this gives her a direct understanding of customer preferences. She remembered one time when there was a difficult customer: "She kept coming back asking for plastic bags to hold her refrigerated food. I asked her why she needed so many



Susanna thinks only quality products and services can build customer loyalty
一田百货近年扩展迅速·黄思丽认为坚持提供优质产品和服务·才能建立顾客的忠诚度

of them and she started hurling abuse at me saying I did not bag her groceries properly so she needed more bags to rearrange her goods. It wasn't true and I felt very upset hearing her cursing. Fortunately, my colleagues stood up for me. At that moment, I truly appreciated the patience of all our frontline staff who can remain calm despite having to stand all day long."

Colleagues are willing to contribute because the company cares for them. Susanna said: "We insist on giving staff sufficient room for development so they feel this isn't just the business of a company but also their career, and this way they work hard." The company limits frontline staff to work 8.5 hours a day so they do not wear themselves out. It also provides a reasonable place for breaks so they can take as much rest as possible when they are off duty. "Sometimes, we treat staff with popular, seasonal fruits or specialty food. It may not be a big favour, but at least it represents the company's appreciation for staff for their contributions and hard work", she said.

Failure drives innovation

To Susanna, innovation comes at a cost. "For any new attempts, there's a chance of failure as well as success. Instead of blaming anyone in the team, you should treat failure as a learning opportunity. Only then can you encourage the whole team to innovate."

Leading a team of around 1,000, Susanna feels a heavy responsibility is rested on her. She follows an aphorism by the late American President Theodore Roosevelt as her management philosophy — "Keep your eyes on the stars, and your feet on the ground." "As management, it's important that we set our sights high, but not chase castles in the air."

Special back up

As a mother of two, Susanna feels blessed to have her family as strong support. Every weekend, she spends some time visiting YATA stores with her family, both to see how business is doing and buy groceries. She said her family is used to the routine and is even very dedicated to her work: "Whenever they see something new while shopping, they will call me right away to see if that can be an inspiration to my work." She joked that while she was a consultant in the retail industry before joining the Group, her husband is now her personal consultant. "My husband is seasoned in management, so whenever I run into problems, I talk to him and he gives me advice." At work, Susanna has good colleagues. Outside, she has the full support of her family. These are the most important driving force for her work and life.

香港零售业虽然竞争十分激烈，但一田百货仍然迅速发展，今年更先后开设三家超市，并计划进驻葵芳及北角区。加上明年末沙田总店翻新工程竣工，业务持续向前发展。一田百货行政总裁黄思丽认为，要跳出业界争相减价求售的思维，以崇优、灵活反应快的管理，才能突破市场的限制。

不能被动的行业

香港人向来热衷于质优款多的日货，八十年代日式百货公司更开得成行成市，然而大部分最终都被市场淘汰。以现代日式生活百货为定位的一田又如何能在市场站稳？“当年日资百货的卖点，在于邀请外来的店铺加盟，但时移世易，现在早已被商场取代；因此我们一定要敢于创新，主动了解顾客需要，并

因应市场变化实时作出反应。”要做到上述要求，黄思丽认为没有快捷方式，只有不断观察和聆听顾客需要：“例如一款糖果销情平平，你就要先想想究竟哪里出了问题？是货品放得太高令小朋友看不到吗？还是不合顾客口味？这一切都要靠前线同事观察和与客人沟通。”所谓“兵贵神速”，零售行业同样如是，“如果换了摆放位置，做过减价推广促销，情况亦未如理想，便要及早调节入货的种类和数量。”黄思丽坦言经营超市，反应一定要快和果断，因为很多产品的保鲜期有限，稍一犹豫货物便不能出售。

以质优取胜 不打价格战

零售百货竞争激烈，同业之间的减价战更直接影响企业的利润。黄思丽表

示一田的经营策略是尽量不参与“减价战”，宁愿花精力发掘一些市场缺乏和顾客感兴趣的产品，凝聚一群“崇优”的客群。“减价无助于建立消费者的忠诚度，只有你能够为他们提供独特而优质的产品，顾客才有意欲持续性光顾。当然，有时面对同行突然大幅‘劈价’，我们也要果断地做出一些艰难决定。总之要因势而行，随机应变。”

近年网上购物愈见盛行，一田的团队亦看到此趋势并做出部署。“一田暂时不会大规模发展网购，因为这其中涉及大量物流成本计算，但我们发现一田的年轻客群确实较多选择网购，所以会做出针对性策略，例如一些特定的产品只有在—田网店才能买到，藉此吸引更多消费者使用我们的网购服务。”

“ As management, it's important that we set our sights high, but not chase castles in the air.

作为管理层，我们要将目光放得高一点，可是千万不要『离地』。



Susanna cares about every frontline staff and the company is committed to providing a good working environment for all employees
黄思丽重视每一位前线同事，公司亦致力为员工创造一个良好的工作环境

The YATA Team embraces success and faces setbacks together
一同迎接成功，一起面对失败，是一田百货这个团队的写照



Susanna helps at YATA Shopping Days to back up frontline staff and understand consumer behaviour
每逢一田购物优惠日，黄思丽都会到门市帮忙，给予前线同事支持之余，亦可亲身了解顾客的购物习惯

灵活高效的团队

在黄思丽眼中，一田的成功，源于拥有一支互相协力、自觉性甚高的团队——即使是站在前线的一名普通同事，也能见到这份特质。黄思丽表示，每当举行“一田购物优惠日”，自己都会上场与前线同事一起工作，通常会选择到收银处协助装袋，因为可以直接观察到客人的喜好，可是有次却遇到一位女顾客刁难：“她来来回回，就是不断问我拿塑料袋，多要了几次后，我便问她为何有此需要，之后她便对我破口大骂，说我货物入袋入得太乱，才令她需要更多塑料袋重新整理，但我自问收拾算很整齐，听她这样大声责骂，心里不是味儿，幸好我身旁的同事立刻替我解围。此时我想到所有前线同事长时间站立工作，还要时刻保持着很高的情商，这份能耐其实很令人佩服。”

当然，同事愿意用心付出，也是源于公司对他们有情。黄思丽表示：“我们坚持要给予同事足够发挥空间，让他们觉得这不只是公司的生意，也是自己的事业，大家自然会努力工作。”此外，公司安排前线同事每天工作8.5小时，以免他们过分劳累，亦会提供一个合理的休

息空间，让他们吃饭时可以争取时间休息。“有时当我们引入了一些畅销的时令水果或特色食物，也会请每位同事品尝，虽然这不是什么大福利，但至少表达公司对同事的付出和辛劳的谢意。”

接受失败 方能创新

黄思丽笑言，要团队敢于创新，其实也要付出代价：“所有新尝试，有可能会成功，亦有机会失败。当遇上失败，应该要视为团队上下一学习机会，而不是要怪责任何一个人，这样才能鼓励团队敢于创新。”

带领着一田百货约1,000人的团队，黄思丽自然任重道远，她以美国已故总统罗斯福的一句格言作为其管理哲学：Keep your eyes on the stars, and your feet on the ground——“作为管理层，我们要将目光放得高一点，可是千万不要‘离地’，这一点十分重要。”

“特别团队”作后盾

作为两名孩子的母亲，黄思丽庆幸得到家人的支持，成为她工作背后的重要团队——每逢周末，她与家人总会花一

两个小时，逛逛一田的分店，既是视察，也顺道买些菜和日用品。黄思丽称家人已很习惯这种生活模式，甚至对她的工作也很放在心上：“我的家人在逛商场时，每有新发现，也会立即打电话，看看能否为我的工作带来启发。”她笑言加入集团前，是从事零售消费行业的顾问工作；今天她的角色改变了，丈夫则成为她的“私人顾问”，“我丈夫亦是一位资深的管理人员，每当我遇到困难时也会跟他倾诉，他也会给我一点意见。”工作上有一群好同事，工作以外亦有家人全力支持，这两个重要“团队”，亦成为黄思丽工作和生活的最大原动力。



Family support gives the strongest impetus to Susanna's work
黄思丽坦言家人的支持，是她工作最大的原动力