Improvements that start with "problems" - Okuda's Karakuri Style
- 29 years of wisdom packed into "Just place it" -

One of JATCO's strengths is "karakuri improvement."
JATCO exhibited seven Karakuri devices at the 30th Karakuri Improvement Ideas Exhibition 2025, held at Port Messe Nagoya from November 12th to 13th.

The person who gave the most energetic explanation at the venue was Okuda-san from the Kaizen Team at the First Powertrain Plant (at the time of the interview/currently working as a member of the Kaizen Team in a different department).
This time, we spoke to him about the appeal of Karakuri Kaizen.

Simple name and mechanism

Exhibited work: "Just place it"

Okada's exhibited work is titled "Just place it there, really." As you'd expect from Mr. Okuda, he has an excellent sense of naming things.

This device is not a prototype for display but is currently in use in actual production sites. So, this time, we visited Okuda-san's workplace to see the actual product.

The trigger was a problem encountered on-site

The background to the creation of "Just place it" was a problem that was encountered on-site.

After the gears were processed, they were checked for scratches and dents before being placed in baskets, which caused problems in distribution, with the gears colliding with each other and becoming scratched.

Okuda was asked by the foreman, "Is there any way to prevent parts from hitting each other?"

Apparently, at first, he wasn't very enthusiastic, but the foreman said, "Does the Kaizen Team only make things they like?" The word ignites.

"Let's take off our clothes!"

With that in mind, I began making improvements by carefully observing the work

and experiencing it myself.

The "Just place it" system

So, how does the "Just Place It" system work?

First, the worker takes the empty box from the upper chute and places it in the lower chute.

The lower chute has a gentle slope, so that simply placing a basket on it will naturally set it in front of the worker.

When the first gear is placed in the basket, an anti-interference plate automatically pops out, preventing another gear from being placed in the same position.

Furthermore, by aligning the gear with the groove at the back, collisions from the side are also prevented.

Once all the gears are in the basket, the weight of the gears causes the chute to sink, and the worker can simply push it forward with a light force to send it to the next process.

No high-tech technology such as cameras or sensors is used, and malfunctions are prevented solely through mechanical ingenuity.

This is truly an improvement from a field perspective.

Improvements only come from use

Since they started using this device, the problem of gears hitting each other has apparently stopped.

When I asked Okuda about the fun of improving karakuri, he replied:
"It takes time and effort, but it makes me happy when people use it on-site and say things like, 'We've become more efficient,' 'Our lives have become easier,' and 'Thank you.'"

Fascinated by the mechanism

Okuda-san first joined the company as a temporary employee, but after gaining a variety of experiences he became a full-time employee and is still active in the field today.
"I was assigned to the improvement team, and after giving it a try, it took off."
He said that and laughed out loud.

For 29 years, we have been observing mechanisms, thinking about them, giving them form, and creating devices that are "actually used" in the field.
Okuda, the man loved by Karakuri.
This challenge will continue in the future.