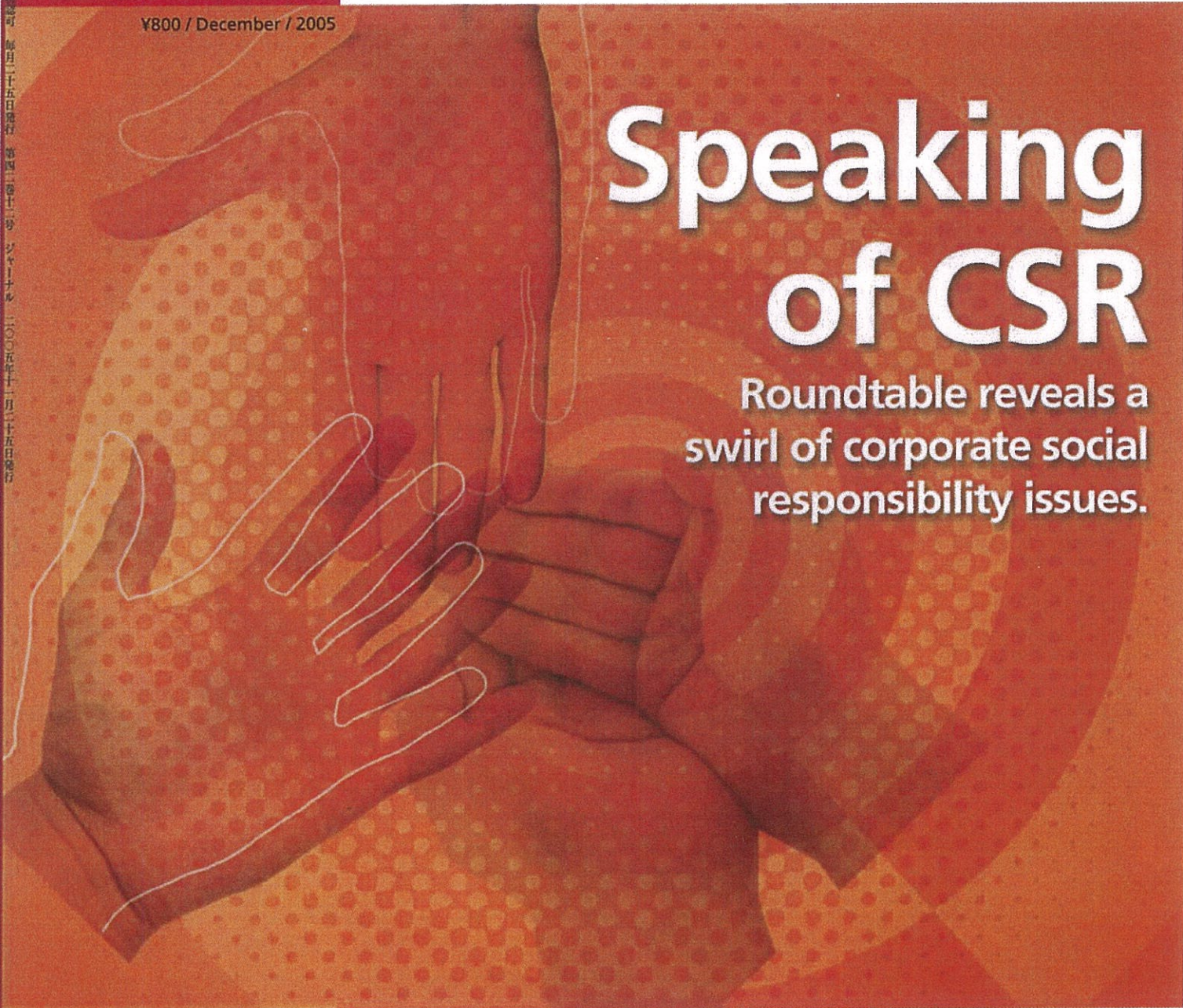




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Speaking of CSR

Roundtable reveals a
swirl of corporate social
responsibility issues.



B2B Procurement
Japan Natural Selection Fund
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SPECIAL ADVERTISING SECTION
BUSINESS SUPPORT

The Scariest Thing is Not Knowing What We Don't Know, but We're not Scared at All, because We Don't Know It.

The Danger of Standing Alone without 'Business Support'

I am writing this piece from the perspective of needing 'business support,' running an incorporated business in Japan since 1978, and of providing business support services to mostly foreign capitalized companies in Japan. So like all of us, we're users, and we're used.

Not knowing that office furnishings are routinely available and provided at 30% to 40% below listed prices can cost Ouch! When outfitting an office, or constructing a building, you probably don't want to work with an outfitter, planner or architect who gets a percentage of the project costs rather than a fixed professional fee. Wouldn't it be great if we could deal with an ISP and network maintainer who charges only a fixed monthly maintenance fee, even if that fixed fee were higher? Long after there were better solutions, I recall, one of the less brilliant things we ever did was having stand-alone computers hooked up to dedicated telephone lines for the Internet. When the computers were left on, the phone bills kept climbing – the cost of ignorance.

I am constantly startled by what I don't know. But I am blissfully not scared, because my ignorance leaves me with nothing to fear. Some of my clients may have remembered me saying: "I would not know how to, or be able to run your business, but I do know, that knowing what I know, I would be afraid to run a business in Japan with 'those Rules of Employment,' or 'that employment contract,' or that approach to a staff reduction,' or 'those compensation practices,' or 'that approach to a termination,' or 'that union' you have." If they had not used us those companies really have had, and would have

continued to have, serious but largely avoidable problems, legal risks, economic wastes and opportunities missed.

Major multinational corporations in Japan often do not mind making a significant investment in business support services. But it is also true that trust will be lost if you charge them more money on an hourly basis for every initiative you take, every issue you step out to enlighten them on, every time you take a Japanese executive or union leaders out to dinner or lunch to build rapport. Where would trust be if you charged per head when strategizing and executing a staff reduction with a client? Where would trust be in the eyes of the employees, and unions, when you get in front of them, if they knew (and just as importantly, you knew), that you were getting a percentage of the cost savings you bring a company?

I have discovered that a reputation for legendary service is attainable through our 'strategic partnering' concept. After fees are paid, you exceed the client's expectations by being happy to help them with a problem for free, even when they are happy to pay you more.

I am convinced that a big challenge, and problem for business support servers and their clients, is that clients can't see how much better things could be. Nowadays, perhaps as large a problem is that we are so hassled and hustled, almost 24/7, that we don't even want to put something new on our plate, even when we sense it might be good for us.

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