

'Rent-a-person who does nothing' in Tokyo receives endless requests, gratitude

 mainichi.jp/english/articles/20210111/p2a/00m/0dm/016000c

TOKYO -- A 37-year-old Tokyo man who says he rents himself out to other people "to do nothing" has been inundated with gratitude from Twitter users, indicating people are happy with his new form of support.

"I'm glad I was able to take a walk with someone while keeping a comfortable distance, where we didn't have to talk but could if we wanted to," one user wrote. Another reflected, "I had been slack about visiting the hospital, but I went because he came with me."

Shoji Morimoto has been advertising himself as a person who can "eat and drink, and give simple feedback, but do nothing more," since June 2018, and has received over 3,000 requests. He has about 270,000 followers on Twitter. Initially he had offered his "rent-a-person who does nothing" services for free, but he now charges 10,000 yen (roughly \$96) per request.

People rent him for various reasons. At times he will participate in a gaming session to make up numbers, turn up to send off people who are moving away, accompany those filing for divorce, or listen to health care workers who have become mentally unwell due to their exhausting work.

Morimoto commits to "doing nothing" and basically just gives back-channel feedback when someone speaks to him. "I myself don't like to be cheered on by others. I get upset when people simply tell me keep on trying. When someone is trying to do something, I think the best thing to do is to help lower the bar for them by staying at their side," he explains.

Morimoto got a job with a publisher after finishing a graduate degree, but found it hard to fit in and left. His boss said sarcastically, "It doesn't matter if you're here or not." When he was troubled that he couldn't find anything to do on a long-term basis, he was inspired by a person who did nothing but get treated to meals. Not long after, he set up a Twitter account.

One 36-year-old writer says she has rented Morimoto on at least 10 occasions. She asked him to stay beside her when meeting a man for the first time, and also had him listen to her talk about her views on love, which she could not divulge to her friends, and how she went on an undercover visit to a women's adult entertainment establishment for her job.

"He listened to me without shaming me about going to the adult entertainment shop. It felt like a support to just have him by my side without forcing his opinions on me," she said.

Morimoto receives words of gratitude from customers who state that "the act of doing nothing serves as support." However, he remains nonchalant about the praise, saying, "I'm not doing it for that purpose, so my only response is, 'Oh, really?'" He also doesn't want his work to be seen as an act of charity.

"I'm not a friend or an acquaintance. I'm free of the bothersome things that accompany relationships, but can ease people's sense of loneliness. Maybe it's something like that for me," Morimoto told the Mainichi Shimbun.

In the current age, difficulties have spread to various areas of life. It may be the case that somewhere in their hearts, everyone is longing for someone who will cheer them on. It seems that this may be why the "rent-a-person who does nothing" -- who doesn't tell you to "do your best" or that they "support you," but stays by your side in silence, has seen endless demand.