

**At his inaugural press conference as president,  
1978**

**We want to be No. 1  
somewhere—anywhere—in  
the world.**

“Our failure to meet the 1975 emission regulations plunged the company into crisis. We managed to muddle through with support from many quarters, but production at the Kosai Plant slumped to 1,500 units a month, and the mood among employees was grim. I was looking to boost morale somehow. So I started thinking long and hard. If we couldn’t make it in Japan, we could try our luck in another country, no matter how tiny it was. The answer was simple. If we went to a country that didn’t even make cars, we could build a hundred units and we’d be No. 1. I wanted to show that somewhere there was a country where even Suzuki could be No. 1.”

**When the Alto was under development, 1979**

# **Okay, so why not remove the engine?**

“I told them to remove the ashtray and the spare tire to cut costs, but they wouldn’t listen. ‘That’s not going to save 350,000 yen,’ they told me. So finally I said, ‘Okay, so why not remove the engine?’ I guess that made them realize how serious I was about cutting costs. ‘We’ll give it a try,’ they said, and kept doing their utmost to cut costs.” (To former chairman Seiichi Inagawa and the rest of the engineering staff, on his determination to minimize the Alto’s development costs)

**At the Alto's unveiling, May 1979**

**You can use the Alto now  
for recreation, now for  
commuting, now for  
shopping.**

“The unveiling of the Alto was coming up the next day, and I was reading over the text that sales had prepared. ‘The name Alto is derived from the Italian word for superior in ability.’ It was so abstruse I found it difficult to remember. Then a visitor suddenly turned up. She told me how her husband now did this and now did that. And that’s where I got the idea. These words went over really well when I used them at the unveiling.”

**His watchword from the 1980s**

# **The will to act.**

Osamu Suzuki's favorite phrase. It implies that an abundance of willpower trumps everything else. It is a call to action, an exhortation to think on your feet.

**When concluding a partnership with GM and  
Isuzu Motors, August 1981**

**GM is a whale. Suzuki is a  
gnat. A gnat can fly high  
into the sky without getting  
swallowed by the whale.**

The two companies were so different in size that people mockingly said it was a partnership between a whale and a minnow. It looked like Suzuki would lose its independence. Osamu Suzuki countered with this simple metaphor of a whale and a gnat. He thus assured employees and other stakeholders that Suzuki wouldn't be swallowed up, while cautioning employees against getting too comfortable in the shadow of their giant partner.

**When signing a basic agreement with Indian national company Maruti Udyog to build Suzuki cars together, April 1982**

**We're based in the sticks, so we have no money.**

“Look outside our head office, gentlemen. It's surrounded by rice paddies, and the frogs are ribbiting. In Japan they say that countryfolk are pure-hearted and honest. So if you're genuinely looking for automobile technology, we'll properly mentor you. But we have no money. If it's money you're looking for, you should approach a more prestigious company.”

**On the India project, 1983**

# **Heart to heart.**

“People are all the same. The foreign boss of a big corporation, the president of a middling enterprise, and an ordinary businessman are basically the same. They all have their good side. That’s why I don’t treat people differently by status or nationality. I can communicate heart to heart anywhere in the world.”

**When the CAMI Automotive car plant in Canada began production, April 1989**

**There's money lying around the factory. It's wrong to think of the production line as a dry towel. The more you wring it, the more water comes out.**

“Renowned professional baseball coach Kazuto Tsuruoka once famously remarked that there's money lying around the ballpark. This was a message to young players to earn money on the field, because making great plays in the stadium would bump up their annual pay. To rephrase it in my own way, there's money lying around the factory. The more you cut waste, the more company profits will go up, increasing the funds available to reward employees and shareholders.”

**When commencing a factory audit, fall 1989**

# **Gravity and sunlight are free.**

“Forms of energy like electricity and gas cost money, but gravity and sunlight are free. Instead of installing a conveyor belt, let things drop under the force of gravity. Instead of installing fluorescent lighting, it’s better to design an interior bathed in sunlight.”

**When signing a basic agreement on a joint production of automobiles in Hungary, January 1990**

**You can't run a manufacturing firm unless you love the smell of machine oil burning.**

“You can't run a manufacturing firm unless the smell of machine oil burning is perfume to your nose.”

**At the CAMI plant opening ceremony, May 1990**

**Cost, quality, productivity.  
That's all.**

Several speakers at the CAMI plant opening ceremony delivered long-winded remarks to the workforce. Osamu Suzuki then followed by stringing together these five words in English. Everyone present burst into applause and peals of laughter.

**At his 1991 New Year's press conference**

# **We're a midsized firm in Hamamatsu.**

“While we have sales of a trillion yen, 70 percent of that is purchases from outside contractors. The amount of value we add is a mere 300 billion yen. So it's just our turnover that's a trillion yen. What's more, we're a tenth of the size of Toyota, which makes us a midsized firm by automotive industry standards. A large corporation means a company that's a price leader and controls the industry.”

**In the company's in-house newsletter, 1993**

# **“Sho-Sho-Kei-Tan-Bi (Smaller, Fewer, Lighter, Shorter, Beauty)”–Suzuki's manufacturing philosophy**

April 1993: “Smaller, Fewer, Lighter”

1994: “Smaller, Fewer, Lighter, Beauty”

1999: “Smaller, Fewer, Lighter, Shorter, Beauty”

2001: “Sho-Sho-Kei-Tan-Bi”

The key to cutting costs is how to make everything smaller, fewer, lighter, shorter, and more beautiful. That applies to products and components as well as entire facilities. These words came to encapsulate Suzuki's manufacturing philosophy.

**In an interview, 1995**

# **Existential crises and product lifetimes both come in 25-year cycles.**

“Running Suzuki has taught me one thing: existential crises and the lifetimes of the products that are the company’s bread and butter both come in 25-year cycles. We’ve been through several transitions. We went from making looms to building motorcycles for the domestic market, then exporting them, then producing them overseas. And we went from building kei car to building compacts, then exporting them, then producing them overseas as well. Meanwhile the company experienced several severe crises. It was rocked by labor disputes in 1950 and failed to meet emissions regulations in 1975. The important thing is how to pass on the experience gained from past crises and the evolution of our product lineup to the next generation.”

**In an interview, 1995**

**Been to India over a hundred times. Never had an upset stomach once.**

“The crucial thing is whether you can adapt to local conditions. It’s a fight between your own microbiome and the indigenous bacteria. If you win, nothing happens. If you lose, you get an upset stomach.”

**To GM President Rick Wagoner and Chairman John Smith when in Japan to attend the Tokyo Motor Show, 1997**

**Bottom-up is cost up,  
top-down is cost down.**

“Deciding things consensually from the bottom up takes too much time. Everyone puts in their two cents. A top-down approach is the quickest way to cut costs. A decision can be made here at Suzuki in five minutes.”

“These words got GM’s top brass talking. Whenever they saw me after that, they’d repeat them.”

**4 new kei cars complying with updated standards are rolled out, October 1998**

**Make each component a gram lighter and a yen cheaper.**

“If you give instructions to make a car 30 kilograms lighter than initially planned, the relevant departments will insist it can’t be done. But if you ask them to make each component a gram lighter, they can’t say it can’t be done. A car is built from tens of thousands of components. Set the tiny goal of making each a gram lighter, and the cumulative effect will do the trick.” (The new kei car standards issued in 1998 left engine displacements unchanged, which was a triple whammy for the company. These words were a call to double down on cutting costs while maintaining performance and improving mileage.)

**At a briefing for analysts, March 1998**

**The three G's: visit the production line (genba), observe things firsthand (genbutsu), take account of the facts (genjitsu).**

“The essence of being a manufacturer is building things. The essence of building things is the production line. The production line is the source of a manufacturer's competitive edge. It's important to adhere religiously to the three G's: genba, genbutsu, and genjitsu. Visit the production line (genba) in person when making decisions. Observe things firsthand (genbutsu) before reaching conclusions. And take account of the facts (genjitsu).”

**At a conference of sub-dealers, January 2000**

**You can lop 30 percent off  
my age.**

“You can lop 30 percent off my age. I’m now 70, so think of me as 49. That’s the prime of manhood, the peak of my career.”

**On stepping down as President and becoming  
Chairman, June 29, 2000**

**Even the famed spring  
waters of Mount Fuji  
eventually become a  
breeding ground for  
mosquito larvae.**

“Everything has a bright side and a dark side. The bright side inevitably gets emphasized, and the dark side seldom comes to the surface. The more intense the light, the deeper the shadows. Likewise, the steadier the growth in our bottom line, the more difficult it became to point out the shadows, the problems.”

**At the release event of the new scooter  
Choinori, January 2003**

# **Manufacturing is a form of culture.**

“Manufacturing is a form of culture—a culture built, moreover, by getting covered in oil and sweat. Japan has retained its position as the world’s largest manufacturer of motorcycles for forty years, and we’ve built up a lot of know-how. I don’t think we should transplant Japanese manufacturing to other countries too readily.”

**Conference at the start of the new business year, 2003**

**Forget about doing things your own way. Faithfully adhere to the basics in all you do.**

“Babies can’t talk, so they tell you how they feel by crying. Adults can talk. So don’t stay mum. Open up about the situation and consult with your supervisor.”

**In an online talk on relocating the Japanese legislature, February 17, 2006**

# **Policy zigzags are something you should definitely do.**

“They say that policy flip-flops are not a good thing when making decisions, but they’re something you should definitely do. A business would go under if it went through with a decision that was better abandoned just because it had already been made. Running a company involves making daily decisions. It’s also important to keep sweating as well. Flip-flopping on policy is fine. Remember: what was conventional wisdom yesterday may be a preposterous notion today.”

**At a conference of sub-dealers, January 2007**

# **Bamboo with too few nodes snaps easily.**

“Japanese cedar breaks easily, but bamboo with nodes doesn’t. Bamboo that grows quickly does snap easily, though. In short, when a company is growing rapidly and its results look good, that’s when a business crisis is brewing.”

**Consolidated sales hit 3 trillion yen, March 2007**

# **Suzuki's sales are just its turnover.**

“Our sales have hit 3 trillion yen, but we’re a midsized firm. We buy a set of four tires from Bridgestone for 20,000 yen, and it costs 400 yen to install them. That’s entered in the books as a total sale of 20,400 yen. But once we’ve paid the 20,000 yen, 400 yen is all that’s left in our pocket. That’s actually the only value that Suzuki adds.”

**On assuming the presidency alongside his current post of chairman, becoming concurrently CEO & COO, December 2008**

**I'm the one who fostered this climate of smugness, so I'm going to take charge of fixing things.**

“We need to bring in fresh blood, but right now management changes coincide with a rapid deterioration in the business climate. I need to get out in front and take charge. We've enjoyed an unbroken run of growth over the past thirty years, so a climate of smugness pervades the entire company. I'm the one who created this situation, so I'm going to fix it. I'll have to keep at it until the economy improves.” “I guess you could say the tougher the situation becomes, the more impelled I feel to meet the moment. I'm prepared to keep leading Suzuki as long as there's life left in me.”

**Before the global financial crisis strikes in  
September 2008**

**Something's not quite right.  
Start cutting inventories!  
My gut-puter told me.**

“It must have been about two years ago [around 2007] that I started noticing something puzzling whenever I visited the United States or Europe. There were all these products—and not just cars—yet it wasn't clear who was buying or selling them. As for us, the numbers looked good, but they no longer seemed real like in the old days. So first I gave instructions to start cutting inventories. Then the problem of subprime loans came to light in the US, but I didn't know the reason behind it. And not knowing raised a red flag.” “People often ask me how I knew, but there's no logical explanation for a freak event. It was a gut feeling. My gut-puter told me.”  
(Nikkei Business, March 2, 2009)

His autobiography *I'm the Boss of a Midsized Firm*, Nikkei Publications appears, February 2009

**I'm the boss of a midsized firm. I'm motivated, I have my share of luck, and I constantly meet new people. With fortune by my side, I'll stay on the job and keep forging ahead until my dying day.**

“I'm now acutely aware of how tough it is to write an entire book. In fact, this passage originally ended, ‘With fortune by my side, I'll stay on the job until my dying day.’ But then people said to me, ‘You're going to keep forging ahead, right?’ So I changed it to ‘I'm motivated, I have my share of luck, and I constantly meet new people. With fortune by my side, I'll stay on the job and keep forging ahead until my dying day.’ We're in the business of building cars. We need to keep forging ahead.”

**His autobiography *I'm the Boss of a Midsized Firm*, Nikkei Publications appears, February 2009**

# **A crisis is always looming in house.**

“Times like these are a good opportunity to take stock of yourself. The tougher the going gets, the more fight I have in me. I’ve experienced a series of regrets and failures to date. Writing an account of them and sharing what I honestly felt at the time will, I hope, give me the strength to weather this gravest crisis of all.”

His autobiography *I'm the Boss of a Midsized Firm*, Nikkei Publications appears, February 2009

**I'd never claim for a moment to have been a visionary.**

“If you ask me, all apparent cases of visionary thinking are mere hindsight or rationalizations after the fact. All you can do is learn by error.”

**Joint press conference with Volkswagen,  
December 9, 2009**

**Our people aren't such a bunch of losers that we have to bring over someone from Germany to run our company.**

“We’re going to be an equal partner with Volkswagen. Even in Japan, you occasionally see cases where one company holds a 51 percent stake in another, and the parent company routinely installs one of its own people as president. But we’re talking about 19.9 percent here.” (On the possibility of someone from Volkswagen joining the board)

**The reveal of the new Alto, December 15, 2009**

**The Alto is, in a word, the car that launched Suzuki into the automotive industry.**

On being asked his thoughts about the Alto.

**Press conference at the Foreign Correspondents'  
Club of Japan, January 21, 2010**

**The secret to staying  
healthy? That's very simple.  
Work.**

“People retire instead of working. That's why they go  
senile.”

**“Osamu Suzuki’s CEO Blog.” Nikkei Online,  
2010-2011**

**I want people in India to  
start leading prosperous,  
happy lives, just as people  
in Japan do.**

“Japan rebuilt itself from the charred ruins in the aftermath of the world war II. People worked their fingers to the bone. Having seen the resulting prosperity and witnessed prewar, wartime, and postwar Japan with my own eyes, I want to give back to the people of Asia through our business.” (June 25, 2010)

**“Osamu Suzuki’s CEO Blog.” Nikkei Online,  
2010-2011**

# **Compete. Fight. Blaze the trail to the future.**

“Finally, a word to young people. You’re going to have to live through truly troubled times. But whatever trials and tribulations await you, push each other to be your best and take on formidable rivals. You mustn’t be afraid to lose. Never give up, even if you seem to get nowhere. Bounce back again and again and again. Being a fighter and competing is the only way to blaze a trail to the future. You have unlimited potential, so stand proud and keep putting your best foot forward. Be a pioneer and cut a path through the pitch-darkness. That’s the destiny you were born to fulfill.” (December 30, 2011)

**Press briefing in Hamamatsu on organizational and personnel changes, April 1, 2011**

## **That would be desertion in the face of the enemy.**

“I was intending to hand over my powers at this point, which I’ve previously missed the opportunity to do. Our results have slumped in the aftermath of the earthquake and tsunami, though, and it’s incumbent on me to turn them around at the very least. To make way for a successor at this point would be desertion in the face of the enemy.” (Announcing his intention to remain at the helm for the time being as business challenges piled up, including the impact of the 2011 earthquake and tsunami and the partnership with Volkswagen)

**Earnings press conference, May 10, 2011**

# **The Japanese are too used to being pampered.**

“I’m not very fond of the term ‘saving power,’ but I do feel that the Japanese have been a little too used to being pampered in their daily lives until now. In that regard, we need to cut back a little on our energy-intensive lifestyle, surely, rather than just save power.” (Answering a question about the shutdown of the Hamaoka nuclear power plant)

**Q2 earnings presentation, November 9, 2012**

**Ultimately it comes down to whether or not you've got the will to act.**

“Well, there’s not much of a scientific basis, but the outlook itself doesn’t have much of a scientific basis either. I guess ultimately it comes down to whether or not you’ve got the will to act.” (When asked about the outlook for domestic sales once eco-car subsidies ended)

**Q2 earnings presentation, November 9, 2012**

# **The idea of having a community you call home will likely disappear.**

“On the question of employment, the era when people were expected to work in Japan because they were Japanese is ending. Instead, we’ll have to ask them to work globally. The idea of having a community you call home will likely disappear.” (In response to a question about how domestic production would be organized if manufacturing products locally gained momentum)

**TV TOKYO program Cambria Kyuden, May 29,  
2013**

**There are concerns no  
matter what you do. But  
just because there are  
concerns, you can't just go  
on about being worried and  
do nothing. So let's start by  
giving it a try.**

When asked about his concerns about Abenomics

**Reveal of the new Carry, August 29, 2013**

# **It's picking on the weak at its worst.**

“Leaving aside the question of whether taxes are too high or too low under the current tax regime, latching onto the kei car tax as a way to make up for the local government acquisition tax is picking on the weak at its worst. That ideas like this are taken seriously isn't just unfortunate. It's sad.” (On being asked about the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications' tentative plans to hike the tax on kei cars as an alternative revenue source to the vehicle acquisition tax)

**Reveal of the new Hustler, December 24, 2013**

# **A kei car is a work of art.**

“It was quite a challenge given the constraints we were working under. A kei car is a work of art.”

**Reveal of the new Hustler, December 24, 2013**

## **Inside I'm seething.**

“You call it an amicable solution, but inside I'm seething [laughs]. I don't think for a moment it was amicable. I'm raring to get even [laughs].” (When asked about the apparently amicable manner in which the hike in the kei car tax had been decided)

**Press conference on interim results, November 6, 2014**

## **I'm too busy to die.**

“There’s no secret at all. I’m grateful to my mother and father for my healthy physique. I still play golf once a week or so, and I don’t use a golf cart. I walk. I’m in good health and have a good appetite. My one concern is that I’m a bit overweight because I eat too much meat. When people remark on how hale and hearty I am, I tell them I’m too busy to die. I’m going to keep forging ahead for the rest of my life.” (When asked the secret to staying healthy by an online media outlet)

**“On India.” Nikkei Business, September 2015**

# **The source of India’s dynamism? Geographical area times population times willingness to work.**

“We started building cars there in 1983, and in 1985 we produced over 50,000 units. The orders kept pouring in, which made me realize what a dynamic country India was. Geographical area times population times willingness to work equals GDP. It’s a powerful combination.” (When asked the source of India’s dynamism)

**Earnings press conference, May 10, 2016**

# **Sloppy salesmanship**

“I’m concerned that constantly fighting for share in the kei car market could lead to sloppy salesmanship. Kei cars could end up going down the same path as white goods. It’s important to sell each car like you love it.”

**Annual general meeting of shareholders, June 29, 2016**

## **As a man of honor**

“As a man of honor, I think it’s important that I stay right here at Suzuki and take full responsibility so this never happens again.” (On being questioned about his responsibility for the fuel-efficiency scandal)

**Press conference announcing the start of talks on a business partnership with Toyota, October 12, 2016**

**I'll keep it in mind, but it certainly doesn't apply to me.**

“I don't think any corporate boss would consider it time to turn the page. I'm no exception. Being a CEO is about embracing new challenges and running a company for the good of society, and that will surely never change. I'll keep in mind what you've said, but let me add that it certainly doesn't apply to me.” (When asked whether he would now let President Toshihiro Suzuki run the show and soon retire)

**H2 Conference, October 2, 2017**

**Please remember the importance of reporting to superiors, liaising with colleagues, and consulting with each other. Observe what's happening on the ground. You won't get away with lying, and if you cheat, you'll get caught. Go about your job with honesty and integrity. In today's world, there's always someone looking for the truth. We operate in a fishbowl.**

“Never forget the fuel-efficiency scandal. There's no way to hide such a thing.”

**Earnings press conference, May 10, 2018**

**A once-in-a-century  
experience awaits us. It will  
be like nothing we've ever  
known in scale and nature.**

“We’re going to have to change our thinking and fight  
for all we’re worth. Our survival is at stake.”

## **Interview about doing business in India, 2019**

# **Don't complain. Use your brain.**

“When in India, don't compare it to Japan and complain about how things are inefficient because it doesn't have this and doesn't have that by way of infrastructure. Remember to use your brain.”

## **Interview about doing business in India, 2019**

# **If you're absolutely determined to work hard, you'll be rewarded.**

“I never predicted that in 35 years, the Maruti operation would grow into what it has become today. There were things I'd forgotten. Looking back, I realize that if you're absolutely determined to work hard, you'll be rewarded. It's a matter of pulling out all the stops to overcome misfortune and never giving up. There's no inequality. The sun shines equally on all, they say. When clouds appear and it rains, everyone gets wet. When the sun comes out, its blessings are enjoyed by all. Some people mope about being unhappy and make themselves even unhappier. Instead, they should make the effort to seize good fortune one day.”

**Interview about doing business in India, 2019**

# **Failures are going to keep happening down the road.**

“Failures are going to keep happening down the road. You mustn’t forget to move beyond them by taking on new challenges. No matter how carefully you prepare the ground, failures can still happen. But once you embark on an enterprise, you must boldly go through with it. And if you reckon there’s no prospect of success, you need to work on promptly withdrawing.”

**“Chief Editor’s Interview.” Nikkei Business,  
January 13, 2020**

**In sporting terms, Suzuki’s track record over the past century has been 51 wins and 49 losses.**

“The point is that whenever we’ve been beaten, we’ve temporarily retreated to look for some way to win, then turned defeat into victory. It’s important to be daring in order to attract good luck. Fortune won’t smile on you unless you make the effort to move forward. All it takes is a step or half step ahead. When you’re running a business, you mustn’t just wait. You need to go on the attack.”

**Conference at the start of the new business year, April 2, 2020**

# **It's been a century of gratitude, gratitude, and more gratitude.**

“We ran an ad in the newspaper on March 15 to mark our hundredth anniversary. It repeated three times ‘Gratitude, gratitude, and more gratitude.’ We’re grateful to our customers, grateful to our shareholders, and grateful to our employees. While we feel nothing but gratitude for the past, we begin our 101st year with soul-searching, soul-searching, and more soul-searching. Looking back honestly on our actions and making fundamental improvements will ultimately result in our being trusted by our customers, trusted by our shareholders, and trusted by the public.”

H2 Conference, October 1, 2020

**What I said at the unveiling of the original Alto still holds true today, 41 years later. It's a matter of staying motivated, chalking up the numbers, and acting decisively.**

“The rollout of the Alto in Japan in 1979 was what truly launched us into the global automotive business.”

**Online press conference on executive appointments, February 24, 2021**

**There are infinite markets on Earth, so keep walking and take actions.**

“Keep exploring and act decisively. There’s a market somewhere if you can find it.”

**Remarks at the annual general meeting of shareholders, June 25, 2021 (where his retirement as chairman was approved)**

**I've learned a lot from my many mistakes. That's empowered me to grow.**

“I've made many mistakes. But I've learned a lot from them, and that's empowered me to grow. When you're a manufacturer, you're not done when you've made the product. It's a matter of selling it. I'm deeply grateful to you all for loving Suzuki. From next year I'll be sitting over there with you as a fellow shareholder.”

**Online press conference on executive appointments, 2021**

# **The meaning of life is work ...bye-bye.**

“Keep embarking on new challenges as long as you live. Work is what we live for. Abandoning your job would be a death sentence. Life is about taking on new challenges. So keep working away. Bye-bye.”