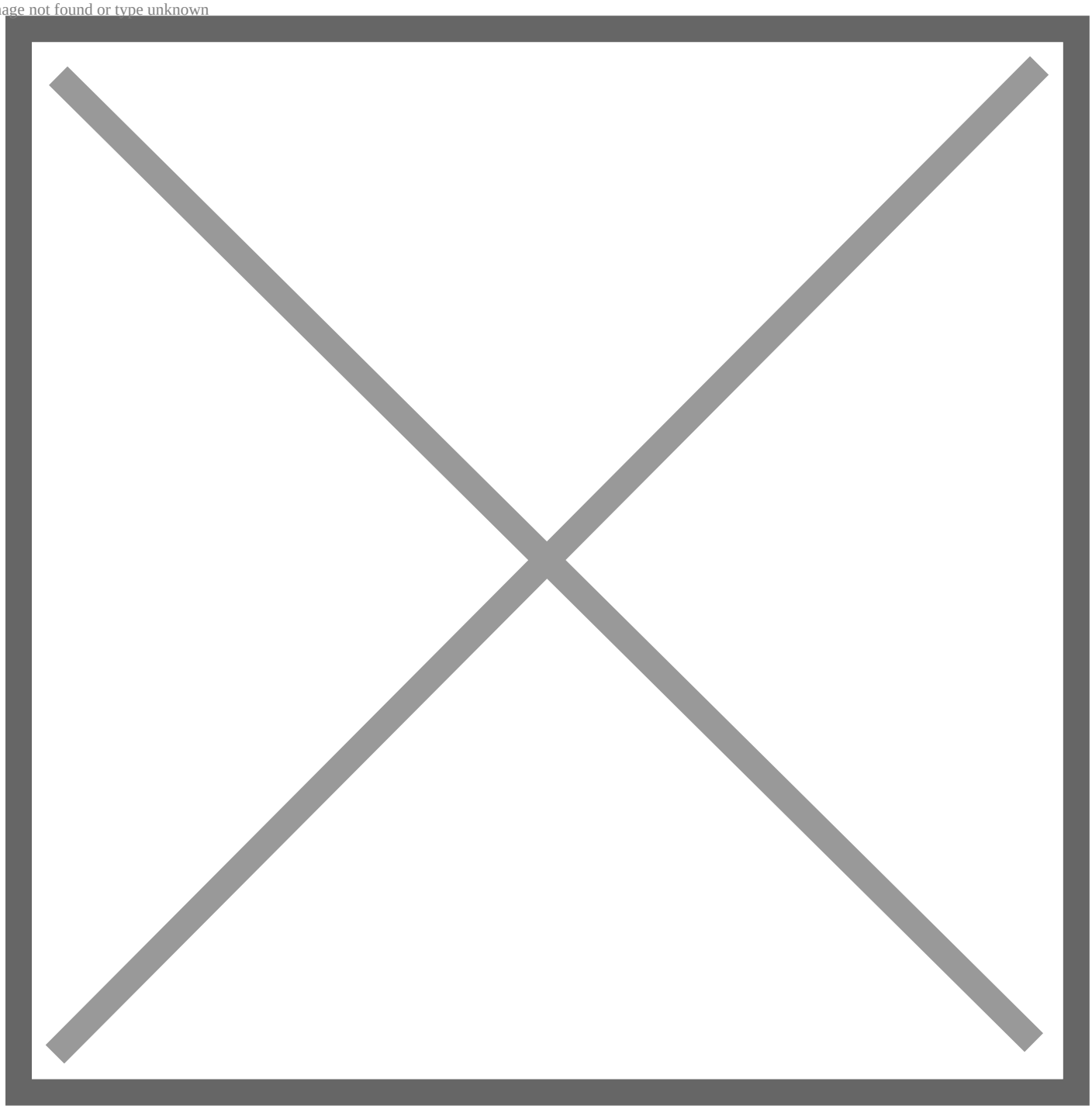
TFS’ Field Leadership Development Program: A Launchpad for Future Leaders

August 20, 2025

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Shannon Smith never anticipated that she'd end up with a career in the automotive industry when she was in the home stretch of earning a bachelor's degree in business finance at San Diego State University in 2017. But that all changed pretty much from the moment she began chatting with a Toyota Financial Services (TFS) recruiter at a career fair that year.

"I remember when I approached their booth, it just had a different feel from all of the others I had visited," Smith said. "The focus of the others seemed to be, 'What can you do for me?' But with TFS, they were so excited to share what they had to offer. There was just a team, even a family, and career building mentality right from the beginning."

Perhaps that's because Smith had the good fortune to cross paths with TFS right when it was launching its all-new Field Leadership Development Program (FLDP) — purpose-built to appeal to talented recent college graduates just like her.

"TFS leadership at that time was concerned that we didn't have enough qualified people in the pipeline to fill our area sales manager (ASM) positions," said Education Development Manager Valerie Walsh, who was there at the inception of this program and now manages it. "So, the team started talking about creating something like Toyota Motor North America's Management Trainee program and came up with the FLDP."

In the spirit of kaizen, the FLDP has evolved and changed over the eight years since. But the core concept remains intact: recruit the best and the brightest, immerse them in a year's worth of rotations throughout the larger TFS organization and then place them in a program analyst role for a minimum of 12 months before they can pursue other opportunities. TFS also encourages existing team members who recently graduated from college to apply for FLDP.

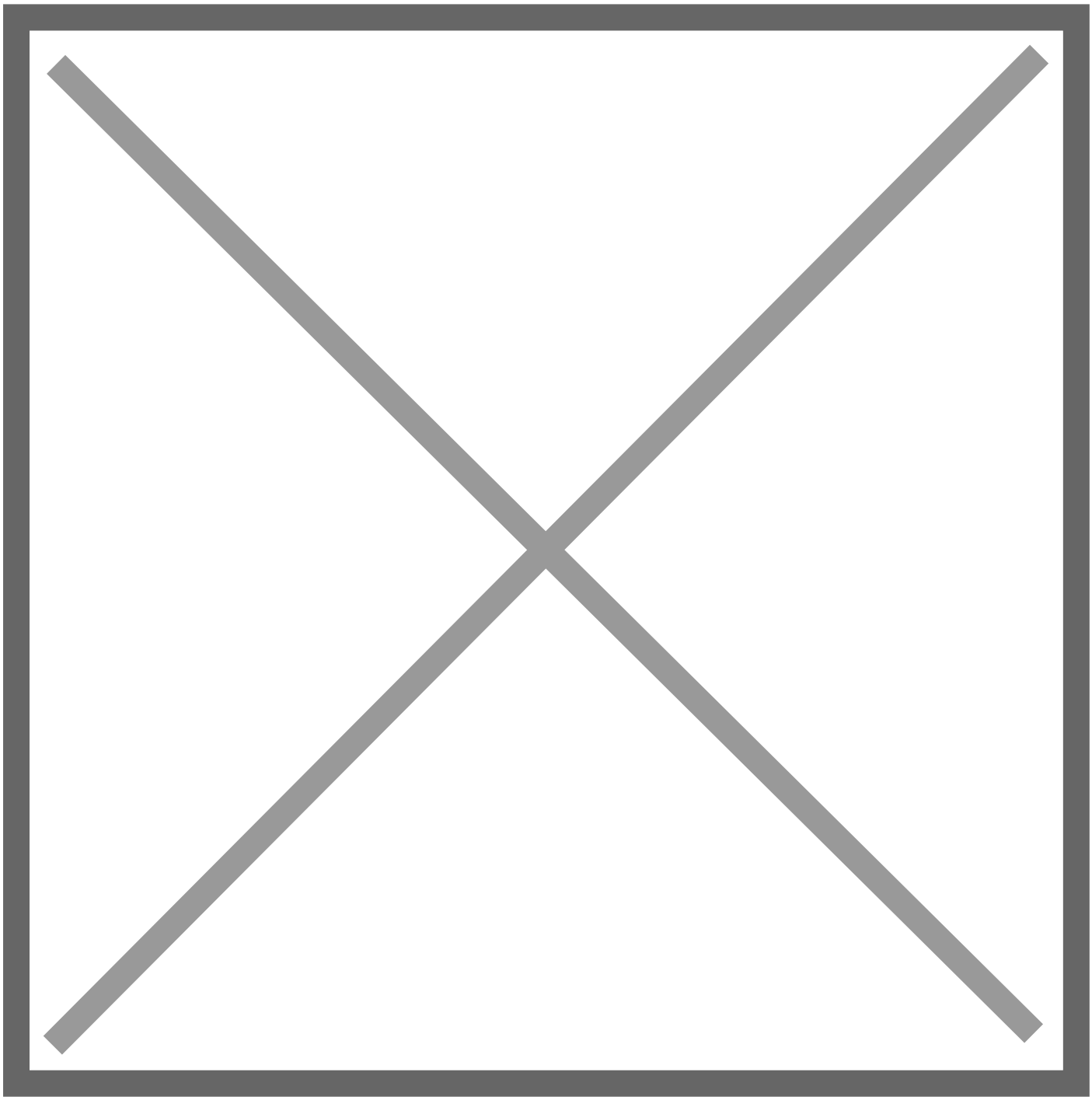
This intense introduction to the captive automotive finance business isn't for everyone. But for those with the "right stuff," it can serve as a launchpad to a potentially long and highly successful career.

Walsh said the winnowing process begins with college career fairs and other similar recruiting channels, then continues through a series of interviews before offers are made to the most qualified candidates. For example, the FLDP's fifth class of nine cohorts — which just came on board in July — emerged from more than 900 applicants and 45 who advanced to the interview stage.

"We're looking for people who have demonstrated leadership skills in high school and college," Walsh said. "They also need to show they are committed to working as part of a team. It certainly helps if they are personable and outgoing. And they definitely need to be prepared to work hard. We've had some people who had to hold down a job to put themselves through college. We like to see that grit."

Marlon Hairston, who joined Smith in that inaugural FLDP class, was certainly one of those people. He earned an undergraduate degree in automotive marketing dealer management at Northwood University in Michigan, then continued on to secure a master's in business administration in just 12 months while also playing on the school's Division 2 football team.

Based on his classwork as well as internships in dealer services, Hairston knew he wanted to work with dealers but not necessarily at a dealership. The more he learned about the FLDP, the more he was convinced it was a perfect fit.



“I had three virtual interviews and then one in person at the TFS offices in Chicago,” Hairston said. “It was clear that they were primarily looking for people with the personalities that would mesh with the corporate culture. So, my automotive background was more of a plus. In the end, it worked out very well.”

Hairston and Smith both started with a month in credit, then went through four rotations to observe the wholesale side of the business as well as dealer interactions. They also got to travel and experience a wide array of Toyota’s operations, including a manufacturing plant and logistics at a port. Walsh said current cohorts receive an orientation at TFS headquarters in Plano (including a chance to meet TFS President and Chief

Executive Officer Scott Cooke).

With each rotation, the participants must also complete a detailed learning plan that includes reporting on their learnings, either through a presentation or a related project.

“There is a lot of accountability along the way, which I think is the secret sauce for this program,” Walsh said. “There is a framework for what we want them to see and learn, helping them to connect the dots with all of the various departments. It is a lot. They definitely have to stay on their game.”

Both Smith and Hairston agreed that the intensity of the FLDP has served them well, not just in learning the business but — perhaps more importantly — helping to kickstart their network building within the organization. Walsh said each participant is assigned an HQ-based mentor to help get the ball rolling.

“What I’ve learned is that TFS is a sprawling interconnected web and that it pays to know how it all fits together,” Hairston said. “If I have an issue, I now know where I can go to at least start to get it resolved.”

Is the FLDP achieving its original objective of filling the ASM pipeline? The results thus far confirm that it has. Of the 12 people who started in the program in 2017, six are still with TFS — and all of them are managers.

Hairston is now a product manager serving Gulf States Toyota, traveling on a regular basis to Toyota and Lexus dealerships in Texas, Louisiana, and Mississippi to train them on how to sell leases and other offerings. Smith just landed a new role as the portfolio sales manager for the company’s private label business with five team members reporting to her, including four ASMs.

Overall, some 67% of the people chosen to participate in the FLDP are still with TFS. Both Smith and Hairston said they can envision continuing to build a long-term career with Toyota given the seemingly endless opportunities for growth and advancement.

“This program has proven to be highly successful,” Walsh said. “If there any other departments out there thinking about building something like this, I would be happy to share our learnings. It really has helped us to fill our pipeline with some extraordinary people. This program connects to the larger Learning & Development evolution going on at TFS as we strive to enhance our investment in people development, ensure strong business knowledge and increase team members’ understanding of career opportunities across the organization.”