

Executive Insider: 5 Questions for Zachary Hicks

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Zack Hicks, CEO of Toyota Connected and EVP/Chief Digital Officer for TMNA, and his teams are tasked with imagining solutions that deliver on Toyota's promise to create ever-better cars and an ever-better society.

You are TMNA's first-ever Chief Digital Officer. Explain the importance of the role.

Essentially, as our products become connected, our vehicles become connected. We're using technology in every aspect – from vehicle ordering, vehicle supply, interacting with customers in and out of the car, with our dealers and manufacturing facilities. So, there's an opportunity to take those data sets and make better and faster decisions, know more about our customers and make better products.

Connected technology is a competitive space. How is Toyota doing?

Well, I think we're doing much better than we were a year ago or even two years ago. We're starting to see that in our J.D. Power results. But I can tell you with our next-generation vehicles you'll see at the end of year 2020 – we've redesigned the whole user experience. We're testing that today, and it's the same scoring mechanism that Apple and all consumer electronic companies use to score usability. And we're going to blow away our competition with what we've got coming in the pipeline.

You've had several roles with Toyota. Can you offer any general career advice?

A couple things come to mind. One is that you should just be yourself. A lot of times, early in your career, you may want to emulate other people. I think it's more important to empower yourself to be who you are and bring yourself fully to work. The second thing is – and it took me until later in my career to understand this – when I would see gaps in the organization or opportunities I'd wonder, 'why isn't my manager, or their manager, doing something about that?' But then I realized that maybe my manager may not be seeing the same things I was seeing. Or maybe they're seeing it through a different lens. And I realized that if I see opportunities, I shouldn't wait for somebody else to do something about it. That I should empower myself to lean in.

Do you have a favorite business book?

There's a book I keep coming back to. Whenever I change jobs or take on more responsibility, I read a book called *The First 90 Days*. It's a book that reinforces the importance of being the new person and ask innocent questions – without feeling the responsibility of having all the answers. I read it to remind myself to go into whatever new responsibility I have and just be the new person and listen.

What are you driving?

A Lexus NX. I love it. It's such a great car. I love the height, and the utility of having the extra space. It feels very futuristic. I'm thinking of getting a Supra, but I'm not sure how all my son's sports equipment will fit in the back. I'm negotiating with myself.