

Mission Control: How Toyota Research Institute's Kelly Kay Is Transforming Mobility

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Team mobility: Kelly Kay (far left) with Toyota Research Institute team members at a Geek Girl X event in Los Altos, California, Nov. 14, 2019.

Toyota Research Institute (TRI) is pioneering the technologies that will drive the future and building a new approach to mobility — and women are helping to lead that transformation.



To celebrate International Women's Day, we're highlighting one of the

women at the forefront of creating a revolution in human movement, TRI Executive Vice President [Kelly Kay](#), who also serves as chief financial officer and chief safety officer. Kay is responsible for overseeing overall operations at TRI, including its financial and cultural priorities. With a background in transforming industries, Kay emphasizes diversity and collaboration to develop a culture of innovation and encourages everyone at Toyota to think big.

Toyota Newsroom chatted with Kay about her experiences in the world of tech and how she's working to build the future of mobility.

What do you think a culture of innovation looks like?

One of the biggest misconceptions is that it's technology that drives innovation. But there's more than just technical innovation — there's also human innovation, which comes from the people who are asking, "How can we do things better? How can we look at things from a different angle? How can we transform our ways of thinking and doing things?" For me, transformation is possible with a team of people with a balance of skills and ideas and intense diversity.

How are you preparing your team during this time of transformation?

When I'm interviewing people for my team, I'm looking for folks who can be leaders. I really try and focus on people who are willing to take risk. People who are willing to look at things from a different perspective. I really am focused on diversity across the team that I'm hiring, and I want people who aren't afraid of a challenge or change. A lot of people don't like change, but I really enjoy it. So in summary, I'm building a team of experts who are risk takers, decision makers and people who will help us transform the company.

What advice would you give to young women in your field?

Don't be afraid. That's what I say when women at TRI come to me and ask me questions like, "How do I get people to listen to me?" or "When should I talk in a meeting?" Those are tough questions because it does take a lot of courage to speak up, but you need to have the courage to stand up for what you believe in. Whether that's in an actual meeting or just in general, don't be afraid to speak up for yourself.