

Executive Insider: 5 Questions for Leah Curry

March 16, 2020

Image not found or type unknown



Leah Curry, president of Toyota Motors Manufacturing Indiana (TMMI) and former president of Toyota Motors Manufacturing West Virginia (TMMWV), oversees the production of the 2020 Toyota Highlander, and more.

What has TMMI meant to you throughout your career?

I'm from right here in Gibson County, Indiana — I grew up in a town called Haubstadt. I remember when Toyota announced that they were coming here. It was the single biggest thing to happen to this area in a very long time. I could see that this was a great opportunity for advancement over the longer term. I didn't know anything about automotive manufacturing, but I wanted to learn as much as possible and advance in my career. So, I took a leap of faith when I joined Toyota, and it was life changing for me, but also for my family. In the same way my parents inspired me, I believe my career with Toyota has had an impact on my kids.

How has your tenure at TMMWV prepared you to be president of TMMI?

I learned that no matter what you're producing, it's about the people, the process and the equipment. In order to be successful, you need to lead with vision and support your team as they encounter new challenges. The key for me was learning what kind of support I could provide to help team members. So, I spent a lot of time on the floor when I returned to TMMI – I still do. The team members here are very good at showing you exactly what the situation is, and what needs to be done.

How have your predecessors at TMMI shaped your approach to leadership?

Norm Bafunno, former president of TMMI, has been a tremendous mentor to me. He taught me about servant leadership. My responsibility is to make sure we have an environment where every team member feels they can be successful in their careers. We must be competitive and we must continue to innovate so we're ready for whatever the future brings. That was my mandate when I went to West Virginia, and it's the same here. It's this feeling that — no matter what — I am not going to let these people down.

TMMI created a program which provides full time employment opportunities for people with disabilities. Why is this program important?

People with disabilities — no matter what that might be — just want to have a job, add value and have a purpose in life. And as a parent, you just want to help them find a way to be independent. We've had parents come in here crying. It means so much to them that their son or daughter goes to work every day with a smile on their face. Inclusion is really, really important — not just to the people it helps, but to the success of our company.

You're also a champion of women in STEM-related fields. Tell us about that.

I've served on the boards of Project Lead the Way and the Southwestern Indiana Network for Education. I'm currently on the Manufacturing Institute and Women in Manufacturing boards. I'm always looking to help young women understand careers in STEM and lead them to the training they need to get started. It's extremely important that the percentage of women in automotive manufacturing reflect that of the overall community. It matters to these women, but it also matters to the companies who need a better understanding of what female customers want.