From Intern to Engineer: James Nickolettos' Journey at Toyota Connected
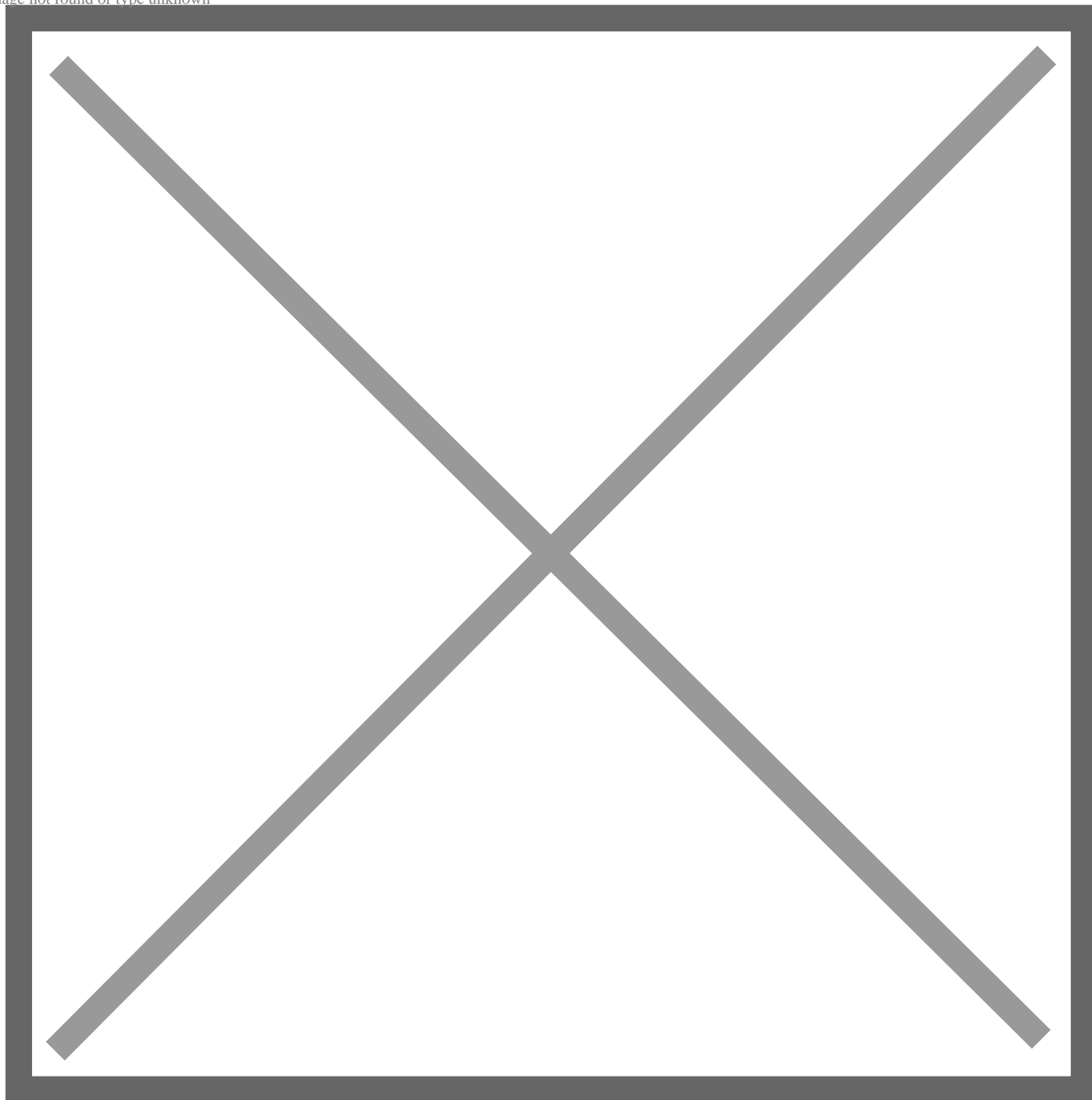
September 29, 2022

When Toyota Connected software engineer James Nickolettos was in college, he knew he wanted to help people. Nickolettos wasn't interested in designing yet another app — he wanted to design practical products that millions of people would use every day. So as a Toyota fan, he found an internship opportunity with Toyota Connected to work on the all-new Toyota Audio Multimedia and Lexus Interface multimedia systems.
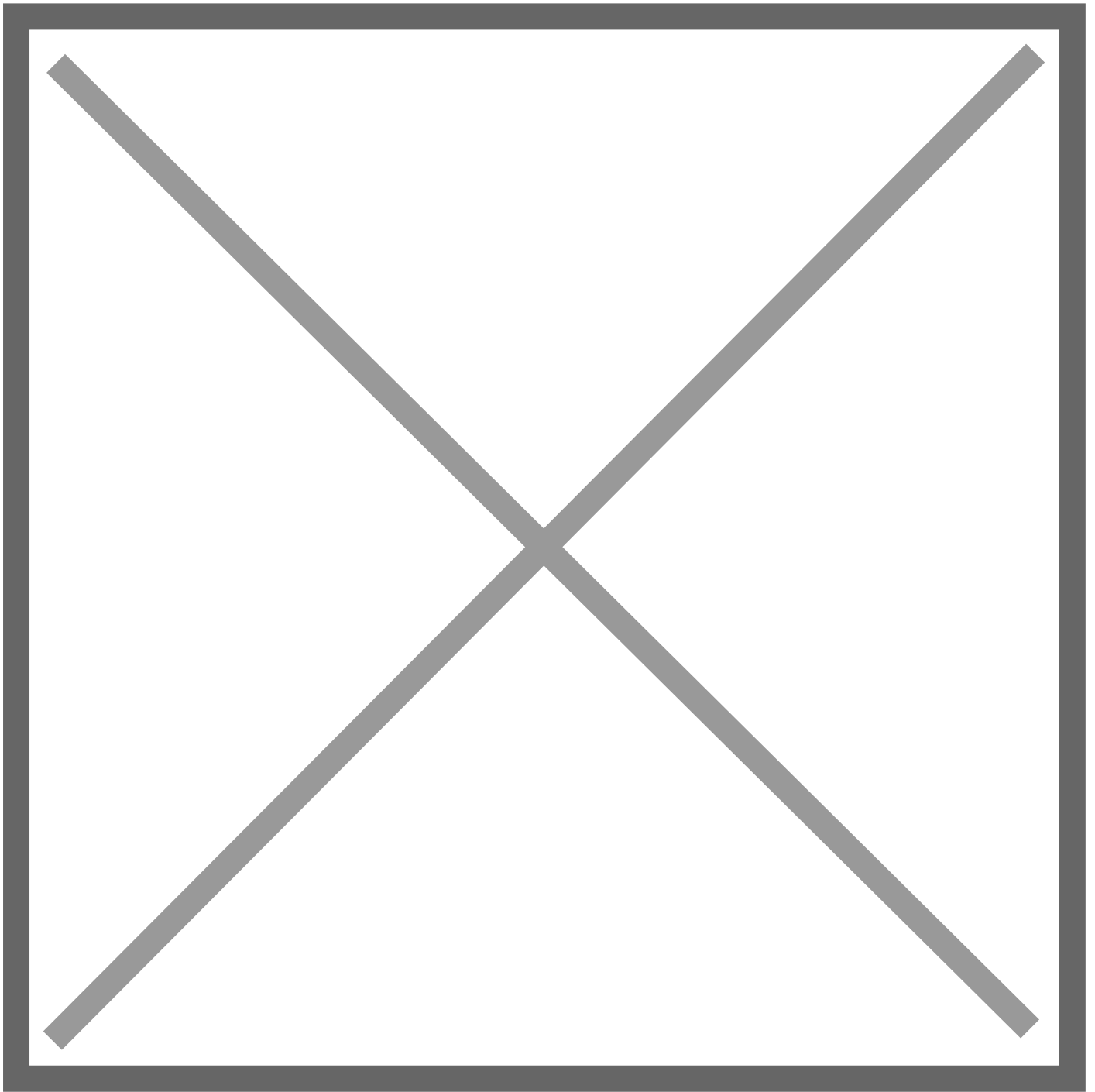
"I couldn't think of a product that I was more interested in helping to work on than embedded in-vehicle, user-facing software," said Nickolettos. "I really liked that my team trusted me, and they just gave me the opportunity to help build part of the program."

But Nickolettos' story wouldn't have happened without a little perseverance: The internship that led to the engineer's now-full-time job almost didn't happen.

As luck would have it, an internship position opened, and he was accepted. The position was with the product design team, helping them prepare for the launch of Toyota and Lexus' new infotainment systems. Then, in March 2020, the pandemic hit, forcing Nickolettos to hit the pause button.

"A lot of things were uncertain," he said.

But there was a silver lining: Toyota Connected offered Nikolettos an internship for summer 2021, following his graduation from college.

Time to Shine

Finally at Toyota Connected, Nickolettos spent 12 weeks working on the infotainment systems. The proof of concept the engineer helped work on proved valuable as something the User Experience/User Interface (UX/UI) team could use while planning upcoming product generations. The open-source kit was designed to help reduce time and complexity in software development down the road, ultimately streamlining future development processes.

"I didn't treat my work as if I was just an intern," Nickolettos said. "I tried to act like I was a senior engineer. That's just the mentality I had. I think that's something I would recommend to all interns is to just to do the work like you're just hired as a full-time employee."

Toward the end of the summer, Nickolettos reached out to his manager and reiterated his interest in the project. He was then brought on full time, and by September 2021, Nickolettos had moved to Texas, set up his new home and settled into his permanent position on the UX/UI team.

Lessons Learned

What other advice does Nickolettos have for young engineers? Go in with confidence and an open mind because the position will be what you make of it.

"You get out of your internship what you put in it: I was really passionate about the project I was working on, and I think all of that reflected in my behavior," he said. "But also treat it as a learning experience because that's ultimately what it is."

Nickolettos emphasizes that although he approached his work as if he wasn't just an intern, he still wasn't afraid to ask for help. His Toyota Connected team is ultimately a big credit to his continuous success.

"No one is expecting you to know everything," he said. "People understand what younger engineers are going through. My team has encouraged me to build projects, make mistakes, learn from those mistakes and grow. They're helping me be the best developer that I can so I can build the best possible product that I can."

For more information about Toyota Connected, please visit [here](#).