

# Toyota's SAGE Business Partnering Group Celebrates Multigenerational Diversity

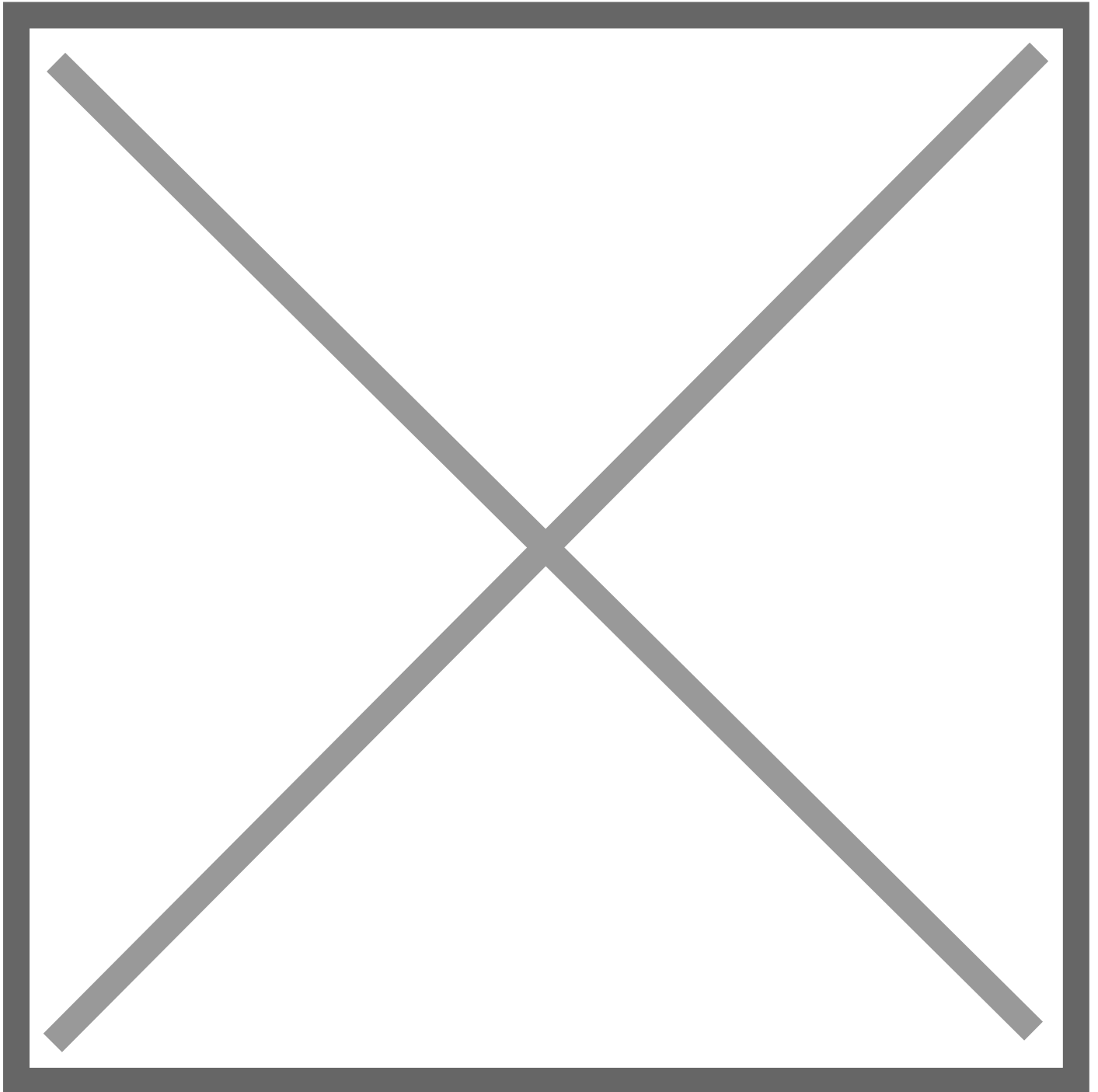
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Good ideas can come from anywhere. At Toyota, that sentiment rings true thanks to its diverse workforce. It doesn't matter if you've worked at the company for days or decades — people of all ages with varying experience levels are celebrated and valued.

To drive that point home, Toyota created Supporting Adaptive Generational Experience (SAGE), the company's 14th business partnering group (BPG), to celebrate and leverage the power of age diversity at Toyota. Open to all, SAGE creates a forum for employees to learn together from Toyota subject matter experts (SMEs), share knowledge across generations and engage in informal mentorships.



## **A Place for Everyone**

“One of the reasons we created SAGE was to really highlight communication and experiences across the generations at Toyota,” says Julie Ayres, a remarketing senior analyst in Inspection App at Toyota Financial Services (TFS) and chairperson at SAGE. “It’s one of the times in history that we’ve had five generations in the workplace. So, we really wanted to make sure that those generations were represented in speaking.”

The BPG is an opportunity to spotlight some of the things that have made the company special over time. “With the transition to Texas, we wanted to make sure that the background and the history of Toyota were communicated and shared as we gained new employees,” says Ayres.

Additionally, the group was also created to provide a grassroots networking foundation for people across Toyota to connect. Ayres adds, “Providing the points of connection, not necessarily assigning mentors and mentees, but the opportunity to get into a mentoring relationship,” is an important element of the BPG.

## **Unofficial Mentoring Experience**

SAGE’s mentorship program isn’t a typical program where younger employees are paired with older and more senior colleagues. Instead, the program lays the foundation for grassroots growth. It provides employees with a less structured approach that allows for conversations and relationship-building to happen organically.

“We provide the opportunity for people to connect, and then they connect individually,” says Ayres. “So, it’s not an assigned mentoring program per se, but more of the opportunity to actually develop those relationships.”

To put that into action, SAGE hosts community events, networking lunch sessions and speaker series, as well as volunteer opportunities, to bring different people together.

## **Developing a Deeper Understanding**

Chris Lokey, a product analyst in Mobility at TFS, who recently celebrated his one-year anniversary at the company, finds being a SAGE member incredibly beneficial. He joined the BPG to get a deeper understanding of the company.

“I’m fairly new to Toyota, so I’m someone who was trying to learn more about the company’s history other than what I can read off the Wikipedia page,” says Lokey. He received a lot of information from the lunch sessions, also known as the “Grub and Gab” series, which are held twice a year.

He adds, “I’ve heard a lot of great stories about Toyota since the company moved to Texas. The team that I’m on right now is about half from Texas and half from California. So, it was nice to get some context and learn about the history and headquarters over in Torrance.”

Eric Mendoza, a go-to-market strategy manager in Battery Electric Vehicle (BEV) & Mobility Business in Product Planning & Strategy (PPS) at Toyota Motor North America (TMNA) says the lunch-and-learn sessions make it easier to foster connections.

“I enjoy the low-pressure opportunity to connect with like-minded employees,” says Mendoza, a 12-year Toyota employee and SAGE board member.



### **Wise Beyond the Years**

While many newer employees gain invaluable insights and a deeper understanding of Toyota's history and culture through SAGE, older employees gain just as much.

For example, Brandee Platke, a senior marketing analyst in retail transformation at TFS and longtime Toyota veteran, said she turned to Lokey when he was just one month on the job for advice when she needed job-hunting tips to share with her sons.

“I have two sons graduating college and asking me how to apply for a job, but I have no clue how this is done in this day and age,” says Platke. “But someone new to the company has this wealth of knowledge they can share with me, and I have 27 years of knowledge and connections I can share with them. I feel like I am not only giving to others, but I get so much from others in return.”

Dee Mudzingwa, a senior analyst in Compliance & Audit at TMNA who has been with the company for nearly a decade, agrees that the common thread among the BPG members is the power of sharing no matter the tenure.

“So, what SAGE offers us is really that opportunity to have other people share their journeys and share their stories and the talents they’ve discovered about themselves and how they’ve managed to align that within the business,” she says.

Mudzingwa adds, “And that’s kind of what I think the value is within SAGE: that at all levels, people are showcasing the value of the cumulative experiences they’ve had in and outside of Toyota.”

### **Sharing Is Caring**

One of SAGE’s main platforms to facilitate these types of conversations is the popular speaker series.

“The speaker series is the cornerstone of SAGE because it provides insight and information into a very large company,” says Ayres. “It celebrates employees that do the work and highlights achievements across the company.”

Featured speakers are asked to share lessons that they’ve learned from their experiences both personally and professionally.

Christopher Pham, a senior analyst in Lexus Product Marketing, says SAGE has had a profound impact on his seven-year career at TMNA. “It’s given me access to a wealth of knowledge and a network of professionals that I might not have connected with otherwise. The exposure to different viewpoints and experiences has broadened my understanding of Toyota’s business and strengthened my ability to contribute to our collective success.”



### **Generational Workforces Drive Compassion and Fuel Respect**

To foster an even greater sense of connection, SAGE also conducts events that complement the BPG's philosophy of bridging gaps and sharing stories.

For example, it recently hosted two letter-writing sessions for two charities: [Love for Our Elders](#) and [Cards for Hospitalized Children](#).

“The letter-writing events are one of my personal favorites because it’s doing community service and it’s also a good chance to chat with people around SAGE,” says Lokey. “Some of my favorite conversations just about Toyota or whatever have been while writing letters. So, it’s great to do those two things at once.”

For Mudzingwa, it’s about honoring and respecting people of all ages.

In addition to creating multigenerational connections, SAGE also fosters a greater sense of self and professional development, added Ayres.

“SAGE makes me feel more connected and has helped me to meet people in different parts of the company,” she says. “I think the connections have helped me to do my job better by providing the connections to ask questions and solve problems as they arise.”

Mendoza agrees: “Being a SAGE board member makes me feel empowered to exercise my skills and passions.”

That’s the BPG’s overall goal, according to Erin Ilgen Roe, a Lexus dealer education manager at TMNA and fellow SAGE board member.

“I think the concept of connecting employees and having them share their experience with others helps grow the organization,” says the 27-year Toyota veteran. “It can inspire others to seek new opportunities within the organization or learn from experience.”

### **Diversity of Thought and Experience Sparks Innovation**

At Toyota, celebrating and cultivating multigenerational diversity is essential for growth and innovation.

“SAGE recognizes that no matter your tenure, your career path has taught you things that could be shared with others. You never know how your experience might help someone else. By connecting and sharing your career accomplishments, you can open new opportunities and generate ideas that could impact your future direction,” says Roe.

Plus, she believes it is key to sparking innovation and driving new ideas forward.

“We think that is foundational in our Toyota culture of “Respect for People” and inherent in all that we do as a company. SAGE recognizes that through our diversity and varied experiences, we can devise more innovative solutions and approaches to our business.”