How Toyota Cultivates an Ecosystem That Supports its Female Employees

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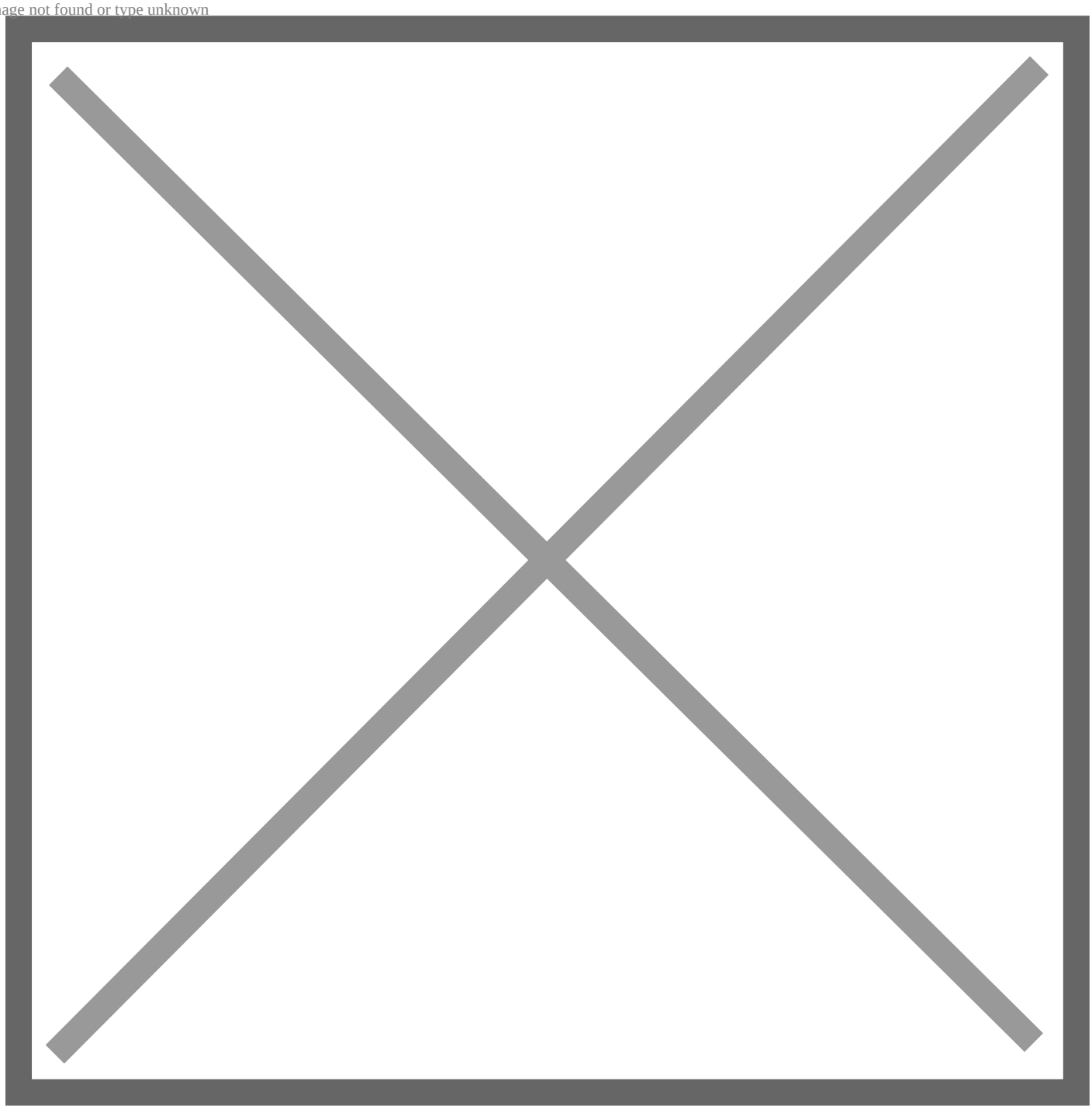


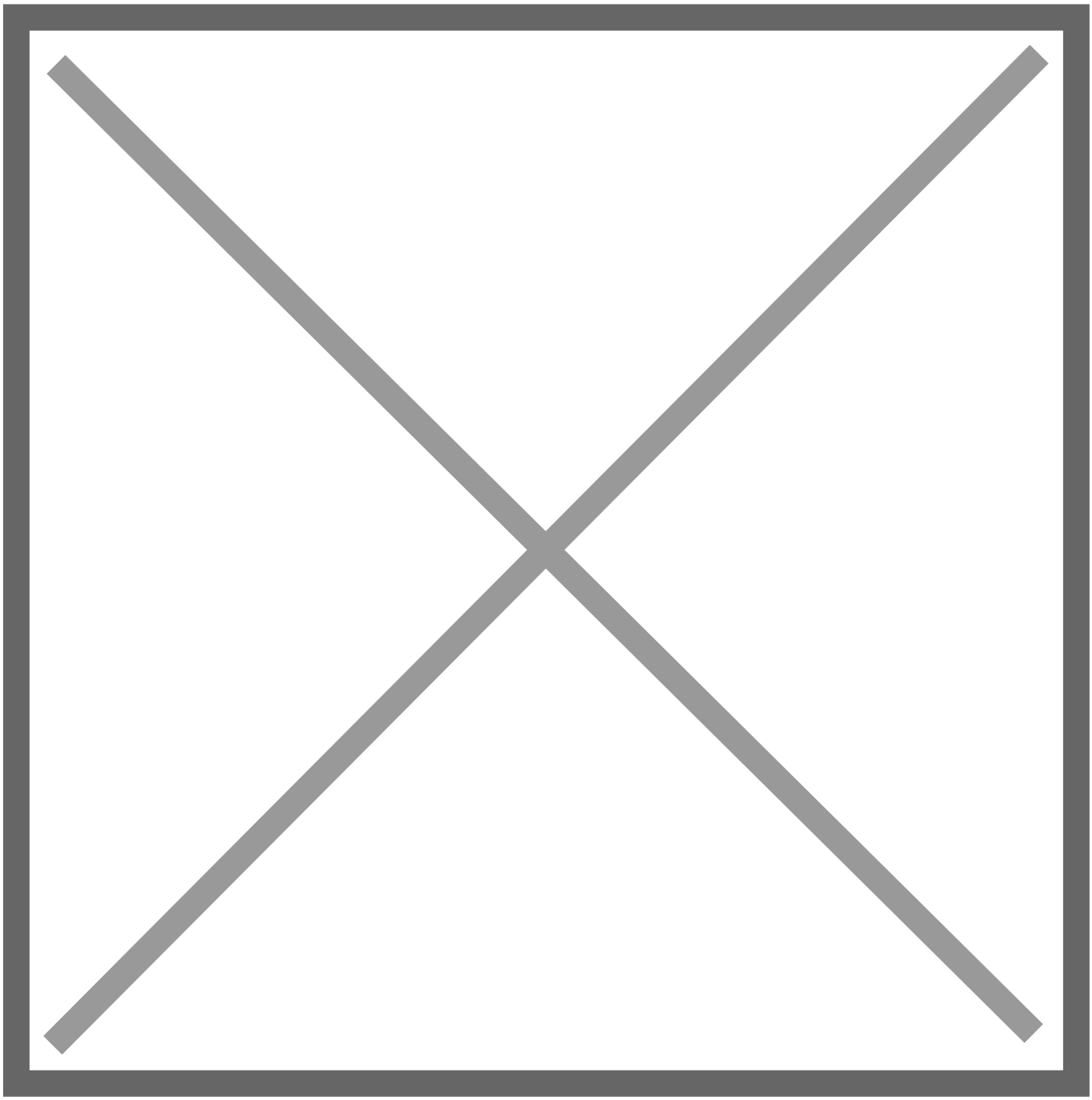
When Steve Arnaudo, senior manager of Talent Acquisition Strategy at Toyota Motor North America (Toyota), heard a female colleague describe how she felt welcomed and included at work, the story stuck with him.

He recounted, “There was a female engineer that we talked to at a plant who said: ‘I’ve worked for other companies, but I’m at Toyota now, and obviously I’m outnumbered, right? Almost all men in my group and I’m a female engineer here at the plant, and they make me feel a part of the crowd. They have just as much respect for me and my capabilities and what I bring to the table, and I’ve never found that anywhere else.’”

Stories similar to this employee’s experience are commonplace at Toyota, and it is not by chance. It’s because diversity and inclusion (D+I) is so deeply integrated and woven into the fabric of the company. Every employee is celebrated for their unique perspective and background, and female employees are no exception. Toyota has put a number of programs in place to ensure that women at the company feel supported and heard.

“We do hear our team members, women included, say that it feels like a family; it feels like a community; great people work here,” says Misti May, senior manager of Talent Development & Culture at Toyota. “And I’ve heard from a number of team members of all walks of life say, ‘When I was interviewing, I heard that “respect for people” is a core value at Toyota. And a lot of companies say that, but boy, we really mean it here.’”

While programs like Women’s Leadership Institute and the North America Women’s Conference are focused on female participants, everyone is welcome to help cultivate diverse and supportive environments. After all, it takes people from different backgrounds with varying perspectives to fully represent a diverse working environment.



“We look beyond just being a female,” says Maria Irizarry Cassidy, a Talent Development Consultant at Toyota who specifically works on the North American Diversity Development strategy. “We also look at male participation,” How do they, as well as all leaders across Toyota, contribute to female success? So, it’s even beyond just thinking about females. It’s also about developing what we can call the ecosystem around them that will help them be successful at Toyota as female team members, and then future leaders of our company.”

In addition to those groups, Women Influencing and Impacting Toyota (WIIT) is one of the company’s Business Partnering Groups (BPGs) that is female focused. The organization’s mission is to cultivate a workplace

environment that attracts, retains and promotes women through engagement, education, recognition and networking.

Driving Intersectionality

Women's leadership development is a top priority for the company, but there is an effort to make sure both internal and external programs do not become echo chambers.

"We're thinking about all underrepresented and diverse groups," says May. "We're trying to balance making sure we're meeting each underrepresented group where they're at and not doing that to the point of only having females talking about females. We want to open up the conversation so that there's cross dialogue and cross understanding."

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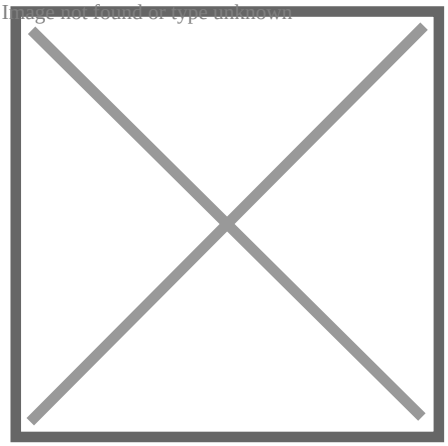


Alyssa Pipe

She adds, "We need all groups that are not only females understanding females; we need groups that are Latinx, Black, LGBTQ+, all types, understanding each other. If we just had programs for females without creating that environment and that ecosystem for broader support, they would only go so far."

Programs that are intersectional are ideal for Toyota employees whose identities overlap across multiple facets. For Alyssa Pipe, a transgender woman who transitioned before joining Toyota Connected in 2018 as a managing DevOps engineer, says having a friendly support system at Toyota is refreshing.

"There are official policies and procedures in place for LGBTQ+ people, or minorities of any type, which is good," Pipe says. "I would expect that. But also, I've received nothing but encouragement and support from all the management team — not just my direct manager, but all the way up to the top. I feel safe here. I don't feel like I need to worry about what someone else at work is going to do or say."

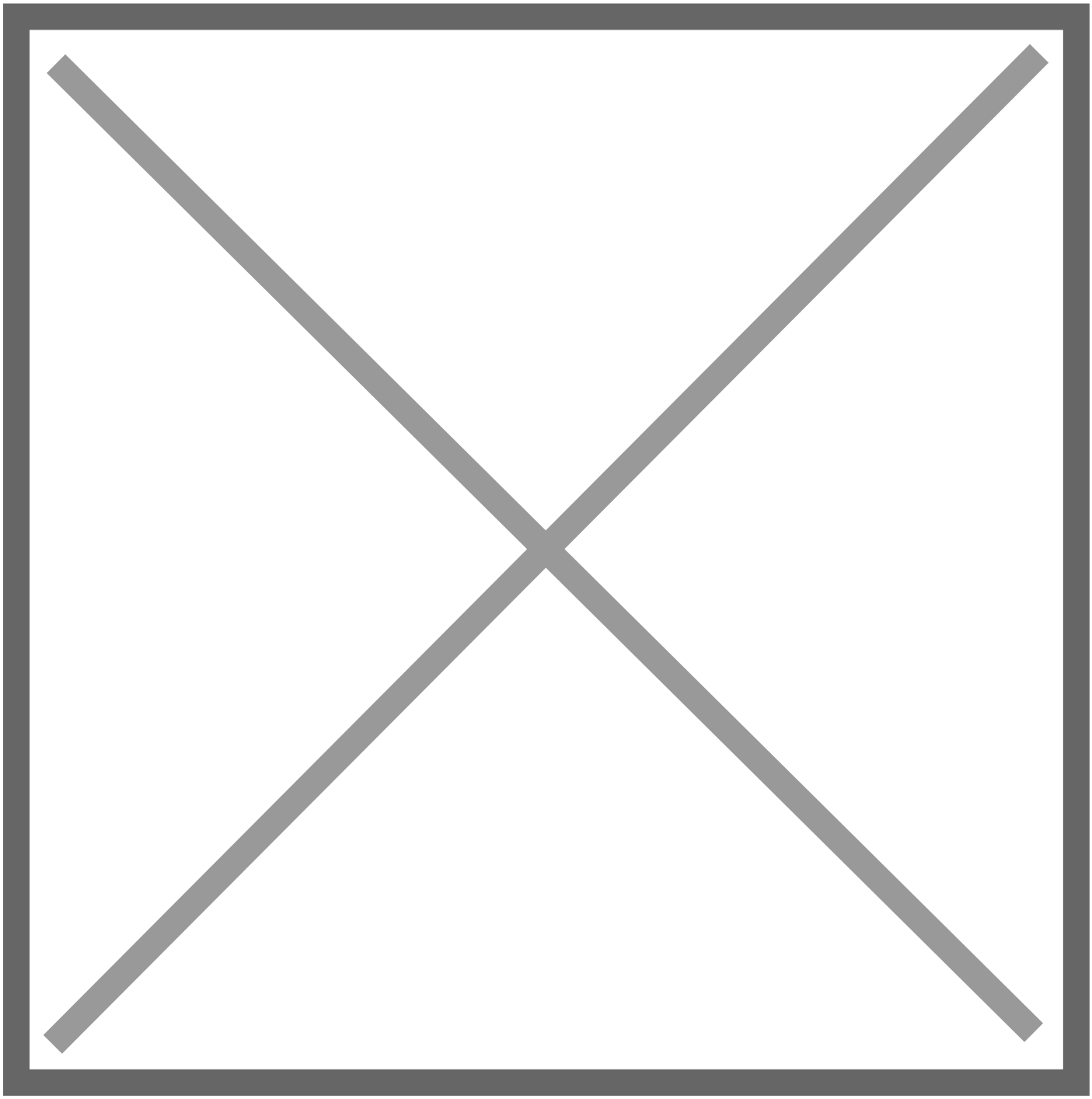
Employees like Pipe are driven to work in environments where diversity of thought is supported and encouraged.

"It's very important to have a diverse workforce — not just men versus women, or different races, ethnicities, or religions," adds Pipe. "If everyone came from the same background they may tend to come up with alike ideas or solutions. A diverse workforce with more dissimilar backgrounds will tend to come up with unique viewpoints and solutions that may complement each other better."

Capturing Data Points to Fuel Opportunities

Toyota strives to develop programs and opportunities for its employees that will result in substantial benefits. In order to effectively support female employees and help them to attain leadership roles, the company relies on data and strategies to guide its implementation and execution.

“We know it’s important for women to come together and have a community to talk [with],” says May. “Then they need to go outside of that community and feel supported. So, it’s a balance of both.”



The company tries to cast a wide net to make sure all of its employees have equal opportunity for development, growth, exposure, mentorship, sponsorship and more, so close monitoring and analysis are essential.

“We’re trying to hire strong, diverse talent across all demographics of our workforce, and certainly women are included in that,” says Anthony Allen, senior director of Talent Acquisition at Toyota. “We look at our actual representation of people of color and women at all levels in the organization, and where we have opportunities, we share that with senior leadership and talk about how we can move the needle in those areas.”

Continuously Driving D+I

As the automaker continues its transformation to a FinTech and mobility company, there will be a need for bigger, bolder, and more innovative ideas, so having women in key roles is vital to us ensuring we have diverse thinking and perspectives.

“We know that close to 90% of the females in the household are making buying-power decisions so understanding the female perspective of our products and services is key to our business strategies,” says Allen. “But also, we want to make sure that we are always looking at what our diverse representation looks like. You want to look like the communities that you serve and the people that you want to attract as customers — that you want to attract as team members. They want to see people that look like them when they’re looking across the table. So, we’re very conscious of that.”

Collecting feedback from employees and analyzing data are crucial to building a cohesive, welcoming work environment.

“We listen to our team members; we survey our team members; we get feedback,” says Allen. “We look at the data overall. We look at that data by cuts of what we’re hearing from different populations, which also include women. There’s a feedback loop that allows us to react to and think about strategies to address not only our female team members, but also other team members.”

That feedback is what helps guide Toyota in meeting the needs of its female employees and supporting their professional journeys at the company. Additionally, it lets Toyota know how employees feel about their work experiences.

Like the touching story that Arnaudo recalls, Pipe shares similar sentiments when it comes to the friendly and supportive work environment.

“Another thing that struck me was the Toyota Connected office — it’s very modern, and it’s very open, so it’s very easy to see everyone, meet everyone, talk to everyone,” Pipe says. “I was also impressed with all the really talented people there — very smart, very passionate people. I’m learning new things all the time there, and I just love to learn. It’s one of the things that drives me.”