

Celebrating International Women in Engineering Day: Toyota Employees Reflect and Share Their Experiences in the Field

June 21, 2024

Image not found or type unknown



It's hard to imagine a world without engineers. They are a crucial element to society. After all, they are the ones responsible for designing, building, and creating systems that help solve problems and improve the quality of life for everyone on the planet.

At Toyota, there are engineers who help keep the wheels turning on vehicles that take customers on unforgettable journeys — and some of those engineers are women.

In celebration of International Women in Engineering Day, Toyota spoke with some female employees in the field to get their perspectives on what a typical day looks like and their advice to women who aspire to work in STEM-based careers and more.



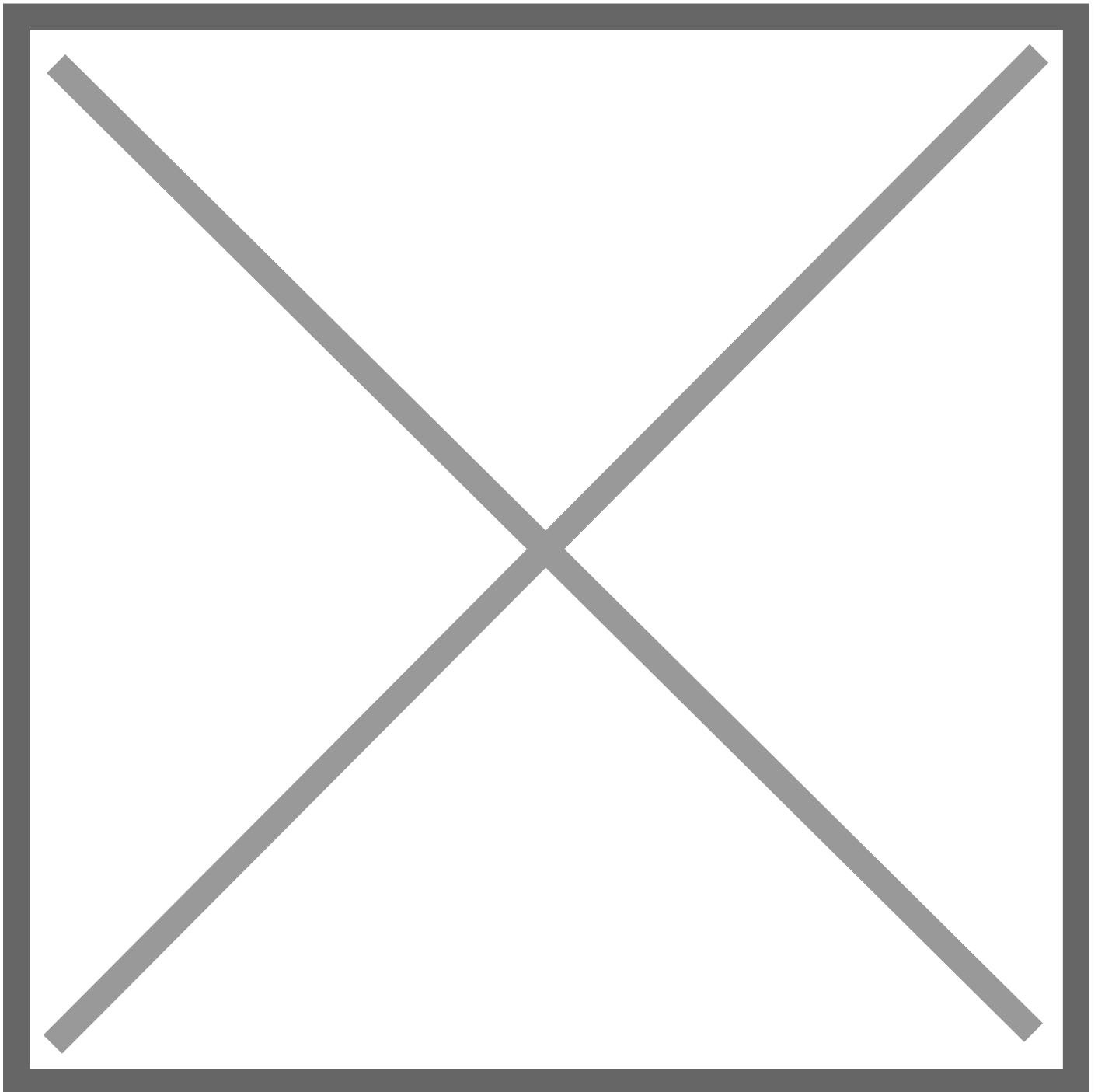
A Love Affair With Technology

For Marsha Cantrell, an information systems manager at Toyota Alabama, studying a STEM discipline wasn't her first choice in college. The Toyota veteran, who's worked at the company for 15 years, changed her major in undergrad from psychology to information systems and never looked back.

"My experience in this field has been rewarding," she says. "I love how dynamic and fast-paced technology is. It's become more than just hardware and software. It's a field that's in the business of improving lives."

Cantrell, a previous chair of the North American Advisory Council (NAAC) for the business partnering group Women Influencing and Impacting Toyota (WIIT) and the previous chair of Women in Manufacturing Alabama and currently sits on the board for GLAM (Girls Learning About Manufacturing), said it's important to have more women in technology fields to inspire young girls to choose careers that enable them to help change the world with their innovative ideas.

“At Toyota, I see more women in IT, even at the executive level. And, from year to year, the ratio is improving,” she says.



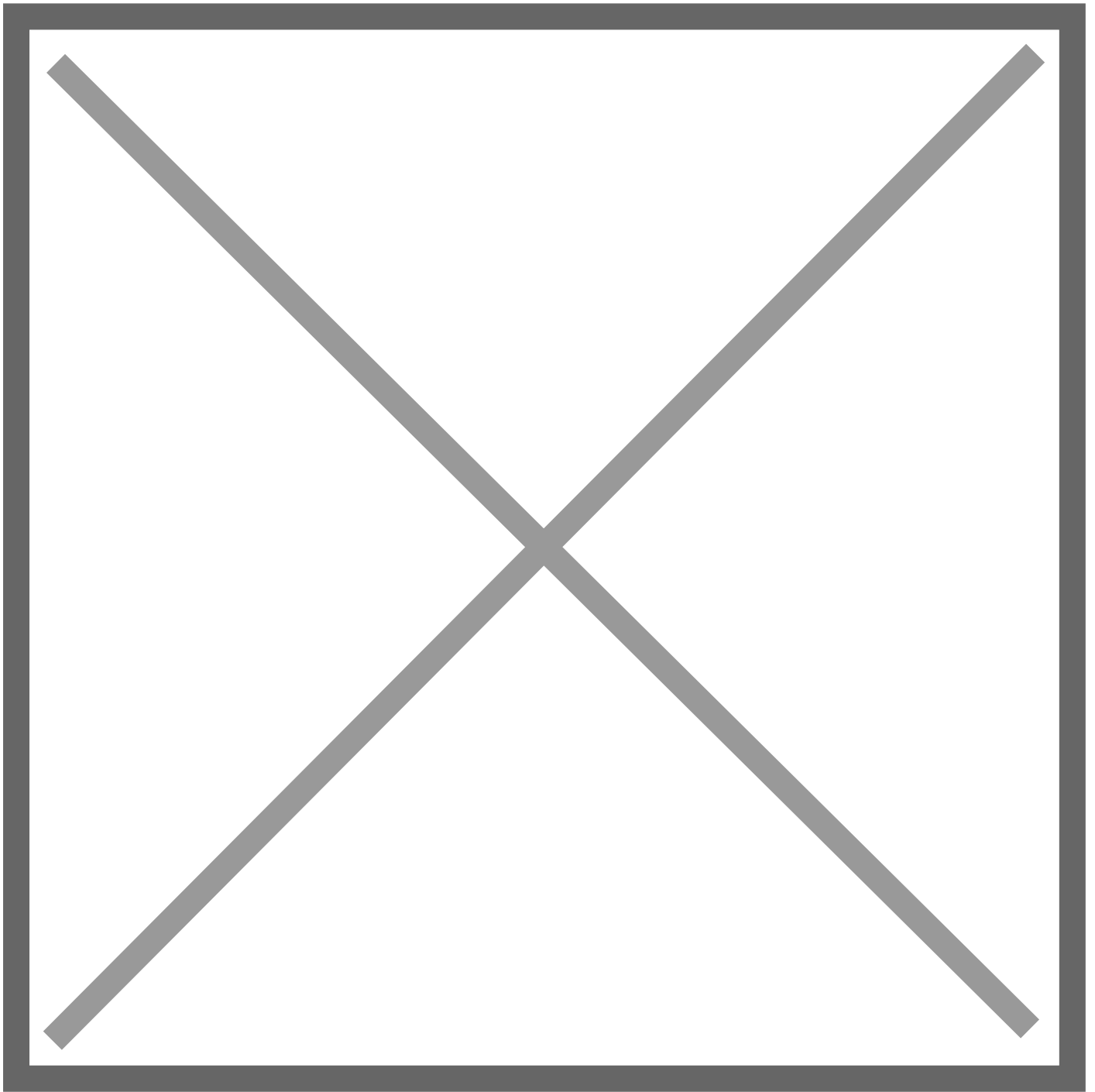
Born To Break Boundaries

Like Cantrell, Jennifer Landin, a pre-production planning analyst at Toyota Texas, also enjoys her career as an engineer.

“My upbringing shaped my perspective,” she said. “I’ve never perceived being a woman as an obstacle to opportunities. I learned to view all women as inherently strong, intelligent, and just as capable as men, without making comparisons.”

Landin says her STEM experience has been positive.

“Working at Toyota has been rewarding as I believe the company values and respects women for their unique qualities and skills,” she says.



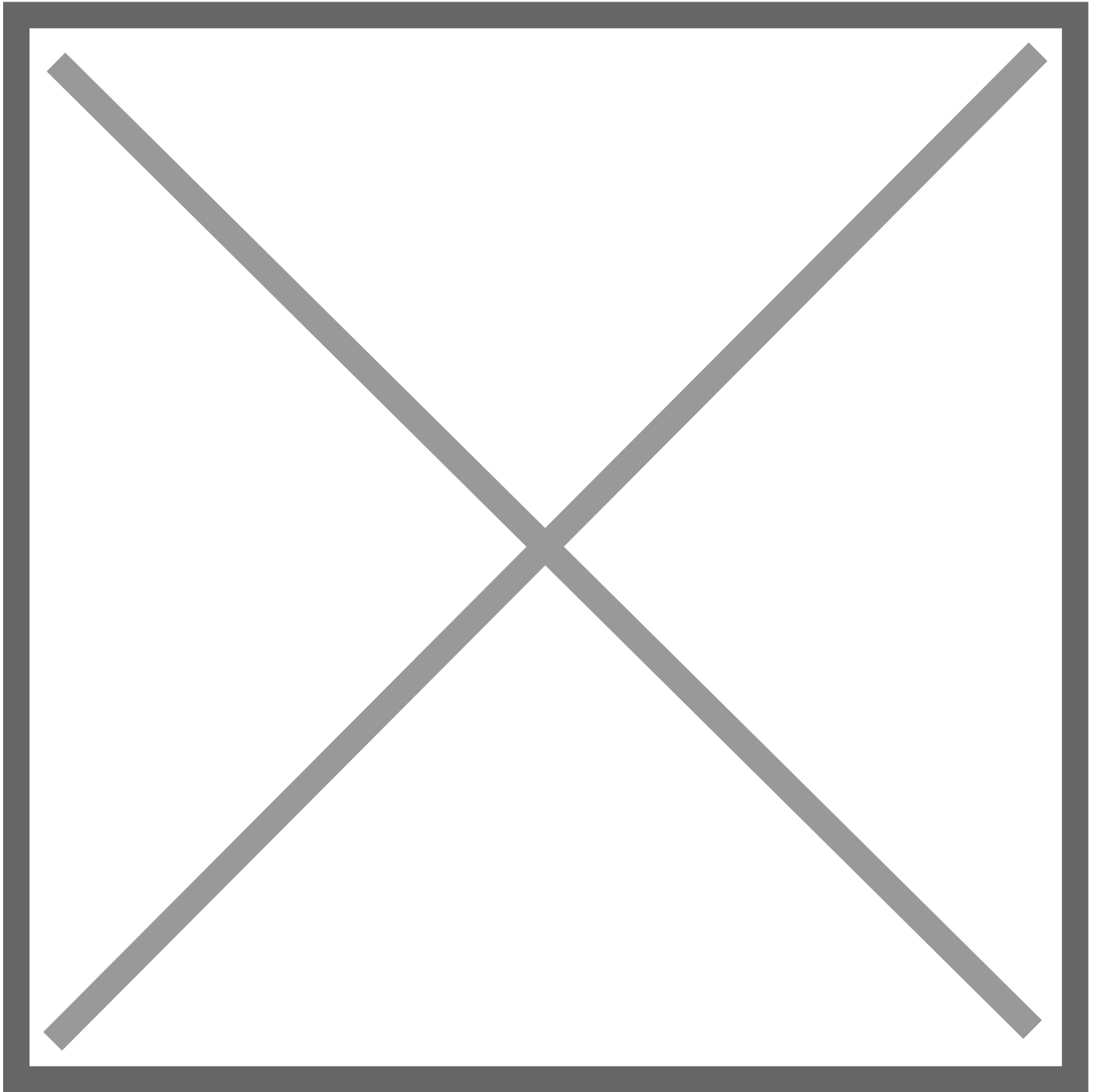
Thrives on Challenges

Senior environmental engineer Rachel Parks has worked in the Environmental and Facilities Operations group at Toyota Mississippi for almost a decade. She said her career keeps her energized and motivated.

“I can honestly say that it’s been quite challenging,” Parks says. “There have been numerous instances where I find myself as the only woman or person of color in the room. However, these experiences have helped me cultivate immense strength and resilience.”

She says that she's fueled and motivated by challenges and is grateful for Toyota's commitment to diversity.

"Embracing diversity in backgrounds, race and gender fosters a richness of perspectives and ideas," Parks says. "This inclusivity is what truly distinguishes Toyota as an outstanding company."



It's no secret that self-assuredness goes a long way. At least that's been the case for Melissa Mathies, senior manager of Production Control Supply Chain.

However, confidence didn't always come easily for Mathies, who's worked at Toyota Kentucky for 24 years.

"I won't lie, it can be terrifying when you walk into a meeting room and start to feel yourself sinking into this world of self-doubt," she says. "Luckily, I had a mentor several years ago who helped me change my perspective on how I feel when I walk into those same meeting rooms today."

Today, Mathies, whose typical day involves ensuring parts inventory levels are managed to support day-to-day production, enters meetings knowing that she's an asset to the team whose ideas and contributions can help drive innovation forward.

"I now walk in knowing I belong because I've worked hard and earned my seat at the table," she says. Mathies, who also acts as a liaison between manufacturing and suppliers, knows that her presence in those once intimidating rooms is meaningful and important for future generations.

She adds, "I'm proud to be in that meeting room and be that role model for other women who will follow in my footsteps."

Keeping Up the Momentum

Mathies and other Toyota female engineer employees all want the best for little girls who aspire to take similar career paths. One way to ensure that they have the best foundation is to continue to cultivate positive and supportive spaces where they can flourish. How does that sense of belonging become the norm? Parks thinks more female representation in STEM-based industries is one way.

"The greater the number of women visible in engineering, the greater the impact on young girls," she says. "Seeing more women in engineering roles can instill the courage for them to explore and pursue this field, even if they haven't been encouraged to do so before."

Landin shares those sentiments and believes the key to a successful career regardless of industry is to abandon all self-doubts and stifling beliefs.

"Gender should never be an excuse to impose limits on ambitions," she says. "Understanding one's dreams and passions can open doors to leadership roles that may have seemed unimaginable for some women." She adds, "I would stress the importance of striving for excellence, not uniquely because of one's gender, but driven by personal desire and determination."

Mathies agrees and advises young girls and women to create a plan and seek mentors and people who are willing to help along the way.

"Find someone who inspires you and exemplifies the characteristics you want to see in yourself when you look in the mirror," she says. "See yourself in the position or career you want and build a plan to get there. You don't have to do this alone."