

“Toyota Motor Manufacturing North American president Atushi (Art) Niimi was asked about his greatest challenge when trying to teach the Toyota Way to his American managers, he responded: “They want to be managers, not teachers.” He explained that every manager at Toyota must be a teacher. Developing exceptional people is Toyota's number one priority. This has become ingrained throughout the company as a cultural value of the Toyota Way. It is a concept frequently talked about in other companies, but it is one that is rarely practiced.”

“It seems that it is not so obvious to leaders of most modern corporations that developing exceptional talent is worth the investment. The talented engineer or quality inspector or machine operator or supervisor is not out in front and center for all to see. They are somewhat hidden, and large companies seem to believe it's possible to get by without developing world-class talent.”

“It is hard to find the ideal people who have exactly the skills that you want. What Toyota has been able to do is gather competent and trainable people from around the world and, with considerable time and effort, develop high levels of talent within the masses. It is not a few star performers who make up a strong team. It is a collection of many players with good capability working in unison that makes an exceptional team. Toyota does not hope for the lucky draw of finding the natural talent—it is a rare find. Instead, Toyota leaders work on the known entity—the latent talent in each person who has the desire for personal growth.”

“Toyota's leaders truly believe that the company's only source of competitive differentiation is the exceptional people they develop; that has been their top priority.”

“If People Are the Answer, Selecting Quality People Must Be the Key

In the 1980s when it became clear that Japanese auto companies were producing products superior in quality to those made by American automakers, a common excuse delivered by Ford, GM, and Chrysler was the “superiority” of the Japanese worker. The story line was that the average Japanese worker was somehow more dedicated, more intelligent, and harder working than the average American worker. As with any excuse, there is a fine line between the truth and the “whole truth.” This excuse might have been partially true, but the fallacy lay in the avoidance of the whole truth. The Japanese workers did not become more dedicated and hard working by

luck, or even by cultural difference. There was a strong concerted effort to develop the Japanese workforce.

Now, 20 years later we often hear a similar excuse with a twist. Now the secret of Toyota's success is attributed to the fact that it hires only the best workers. Because of other extenuating circumstances, Toyota is able to pay higher wages and benefits and thus attract and retain exceptional employees. Again, there is an element of truth in this excuse[...]"

Excerpts From "Toyota Talent"

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