

Speaker Spotlight

Cheryl Thompson

Director, Prototype
American Axle & Manufacturing

Founder
CADIA

Cheryl Thompson is the Director of Prototype at AAM - American Axle & Manufacturing and Founder of CADIA (The Center for Automotive Diversity, Inclusion & Advancement), an organization dedicated to doubling the number of women leaders in the automotive industry by 2030.



Cheryl has 30 years of experience at Ford Motor Co. with positions ranging from skilled trades, operations, engineering and leadership. She is a Six Sigma trained and certified Black Belt, and is the winner of two Diversity and Inclusion Awards from Ford Motor Company.

In November, Cheryl will speak at the American Automotive Summit on "Building Engaged Teams That Drive Operational Excellence."

We spoke with Cheryl in advance of the summit about the current state of the automotive manufacturing landscape, the new and exciting initiatives taking place at AAM and CADIA, and how she has developed as a leader in her own career.

"The keys to success have been building relationships and coming from a place of service."

How would you describe your leadership style?

My leadership style is inclusive and collaborative. I want to know what everyone thinks because I know everyone has their own ideas on how to make things better. I learned this early on in my career having worked on the floor, and later as an engineer working with the people who produce the cars every day and all day. No one knows more about the job and its challenges and opportunities than they do. I also do not believe in micromanaging. My philosophy is you can never manage everything by yourself and not make a mistake – it is better to empower your team and trust them. If a mistake is made – it is everyone's mistake to own and learn from. The result: We all get better!

What are the most important minutes of the day to sustain and grow your organizational goals?

My mornings! I wake up really early and start the day with a short meditation and some journaling to get all of the thoughts out of my head so that I can start the day with a clear head and a sense of what my priorities are for the day.

What is the best piece of advice you've received in your career?

Focus on the high impact things that are going to impact the bottom line and stop working on the low value tasks and activities that you're doing to people please.

What was the toughest challenge you've faced in your career and how did you overcome it?

I have had several challenges which have all made me a better leader. My favorite and most recent challenge is starting with a new company after being with another company for 31 years. I had to change my perspective moving from the customer side to the supplier side and had to essentially start over with building my network, reputation and learning a whole new culture. The keys to success have been building relationships and coming from a place of service.

From your perspective, what is the current state of the automotive manufacturing landscape?

It is a very exciting time. The landscape is changing rapidly with technology advancements such as: mobility, autonomous vehicles, artificial intelligence, additive manufacturing and the digital transformation. I've been in the industry for over 30 years and I've never witnessed such exponential transformation.

What are some of the new and exciting initiatives taking place at AAM and CADIA?

[AAM](#) is a premier global leader in driveline, metal forming, powertrain and casting technologies with 25k associates in nearly 90 locations, across 17 countries. New and exciting initiatives include our QUANTUM lightweight driveline technology and the move into electrification.

[CADIA](#), The Center for Automotive Diversity, Inclusion & Advancement, is on a mission to double the number of women leaders in automotive by 2030. With the changing landscape, having different perspectives at the tables where decisions are made has never been more important.

What do you think the greatest challenge is that automotive manufacturing executives face?

There are several with the rapidly advancing technology and political challenges such as tariffs, but I would say the greatest challenge is the talent gap. Finding, training and engaging the people who will fill the critical roles that will help us transform this industry. Nothing can be accomplished without the right people.

To learn more, join us at the American Automotive Summit.

[View the program](#)

 GENERIS

AMERICAN AUTOMOTIVE SUMMIT

@AutomotiveMfg

