

Taylor-ed for Success

As president and CEO of Mercedes-Benz U.S. International Inc., Bill Taylor is at the center of the automotive industry's shift toward globalization. In a recent interview, he offered his unique insight into the auto industry and his philosophy of success.

On going global:

When Mercedes built this plant in 1993, it was our first operation outside of Germany. With it, we began the process of globalization; we've been learning by doing ever since.

When we came to the U.S., we were driven by a need for new and more diverse products in new market segments and by a need to increase total volume. We could do that only through a presence in the U.S. market, not just with product but also through physical presence.

On beginnings:

I always wanted to build something that the end customer could put his hands on and love. My first job in the automotive business was with

the Ford Motor Company. I've been fortunate to work with three great automotive brands: Ford, Toyota and now Mercedes-Benz.

On his most memorable business lessons:

The one I've learned over and over again is that we typically don't ask our team members to do enough. People really want to do more; you have to allow them to participate. If you give people the opportunity, they will constantly surprise you.

On the key ingredients to success:

The keys to success in our business are centered on organizational involvement—how we educate people, how we train them, how we challenge them. Another important factor is communicating clearly the truth of the marketplace to our team. They need to know where we stand. Finally, we create scorecards for everyone. People need to understand what is expected of them and to know how they are progressing.

On the state of the automotive industry:

The entire industry can be described in a few words: competitive, challenging, risky. It's more customer driven; customer demands are higher than ever. It's global. We're learning what global truly means, and not all the answers have been pleasant.

On the future of the old economy:

Businesses have limited control over the economy. We can control our ability to respond to the market, however. To that end, the winners will be those companies who successfully engage their entire organization.

On the best advice he's ever received:

Be quiet and listen. If you're going to lead an organization, you need to understand other people. You have to be a good listener. And keep it simple. There is great truth in simplicity.

On customer satisfaction:

Customer satisfaction is the heart of our business. We begin by listening to our customers to understand their needs, and then we work to build a product that exceeds their expectations.

Since we opened this plant, Burr & Forman has done the same thing for us. They are responsive to our needs; whenever we've had a question, they've given us timely answers. The attorneys at Burr & Forman believe as I do that client satisfaction is a critical part of their business. That's why our relationship will last years into the future.

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