



Interview with Akio Toyoda about *Toyota Under Fire*

By Jeffrey K. Liker
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Background: When *Toyota Under Fire* came out in Japanese, Akio Toyoda immediately read it over a weekend. He then ordered 500 copies and told all Toyota executives they should read the book. He also recommended it to Toyota suppliers. He said it was much more than a book about the recall crisis, and actually was a book that explained deeply “The Toyota Way” in practice. When Jeffrey Liker was in Japan for other purposes Akio Toyoda asked to meet with him to thank him for writing the book. Jeffrey Liker interviewed Akio Toyoda in his office in Japan on September 3, 2011 to learn more about his impressions of the book.

Liker: You said you really liked *Toyota Under Fire*. What did you like about it?

Akio Toyoda: I think that because this book logically and in an unbiased manner explains what I really wanted to say personally. So I was very much impressed to read this book because that is exactly what this book is doing. So I want to express how much I appreciate your book.

I have been a distributor for your book. Now I have two jobs (laughed). I am just an ordinary car sales guy. I believe in this book that is why I am selling it (all laugh).

Liker: What did you want your executives to learn from the book?

Akio Toyoda: Your book at the beginning and also at the end, you emphasize that you have to go back to the basics and this is the thing that I want them to learn the most. The business environment keeps changing. It is a dynamic environment, but as a company Toyoda was able to grow for the past 70 years or so and this is because there are some timeless values that we always have to keep true to. And that is the basics and that is what I would like them to learn. For example, in the aftermath of the earthquake, and also because of sustained strong yen, if you tried to make judgment only from a logical viewpoint maybe there is no justification for continuing to produce here in Japan. But as you know we have announced that we are going to continue to have a presence in the Northern part of Japan and also we recently announced several alliances with other companies one after another. All those things were because your book has awakened our people and we are now trying to put more focus onto the basics.

Liker: The Toyota Way 2001 added the 2001 because the Toyota Way is constantly changing. If the principles are really timeless perhaps it should just be called The Toyota Way.

Akio Toyoda: I agree. Good suggestion.



Jeffrey Liker and Akio Toyoda in Toyoda-san's office in Nagoya, September 3, 2011. Holding Japanese edition of *Toyota Under Fire*.