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Never has the next generation of dealers had such a big choice to make. Either decision, I believe, presents endless opportunities, as dealerships have never been more profitable (should they wish to sell) and opportunities to diversify and compete have never been more substantial (if they want to stay in the game and build an empire).

What prompted/inspired you to join this industry?

My entry into automotive retail was a lucky coincidence. My career started in direct mail marketing, working with national retail companies and magazine publishers. With the evolution of online and email marketing, I was recruited by one of the first software email service providers (Responsys, since acquired by Oracle). Its core offering was building online marketing strategies to help national brands drive growth. I served as the primary marketing consultant to BMW of North America. I was part of the team that launched the Guy Ritchie-produced BMW Series of short internet films, "The Hire," promoted through email distribution. This led to my love affair with cars and automotive retail.

A more relevant question is what has kept me from leaving the industry. The answer is the people. Regardless of the roles I have held, organizations for which I have served, or clients I have advised, the people are what make it special and unique.

Although our industry is large and diverse, it is also tiny and familial. In the best of times, we all have friendly competition, and in the worst of times, we come together to help one another. And every moment in between, we invest in our communities, employees and each other.

What accomplishment are you most proud of in your career?

To point to one accomplishment is tough. Picking one, it would be facing adversity head-on and overcoming it. From growing up underprivileged and without my parents and siblings, being told I would never be a candidate for college, and choosing a career where I'd have to overcome stereotypes, I took every single one (and more) as direct challenges to be the best version of myself.

My grandparents raised me. They were children of the Great Depression, young adults during World War II (my grandfather was drafted to serve in the United States Army). Their strength and perspective have been invaluable to me. My grandfather said something that has always stayed with me: "Aim, no one can ever take your work ethic, education, or achievements away from you. Work hard, be humble, take nothing for granted, and always be kind."

I worked tirelessly on my undergraduate degree, ultimately obtaining my MBA, which led me to serve as an Adjunct Professor for more than five years. Needless to say, I have had a remarkable career working alongside some of the best in the business. I am humbled, yet proud to be here, a recognized female leader in automotive retail!

What book, film, person or company has inspired you professionally?

My grandfather was undoubtedly the most influential person in my life. However, as I reflect on my career, one name constantly flashes like a neon sign: James L. "Butch" Williams.

Butch was the managing partner for a well-known CPA dealership practice. I had the honor of working alongside him on firm mergers, branding national practice lines, and growing the dealership practice by almost double. He led with kindness, humility, and the ability always to find the optimistic side of any challenge. Not to mention, his knowledge and passion for the car business were infectious. It permeated the entire "DSG" as we called it. Many of the lessons of patience and persistence he taught me, alongside the depth of knowledge and experience he introduced me to, have shaped the auto retail leader I am today.

I believe it's rare in your career to work alongside leaders and teams that feel like family and who challenge you to grow and support you unconditionally. I had that once. I am proud to say that I am blessed to have that opportunity again in my career, working alongside Alan and the team at Haig Partners, who continue to inspire and challenge me every day.

What is the top trend you're watching in retail automotive this year?

The automotive retail industry is known for its constant change. I suppose I'm not focused on any one trend. Instead, it is about how our industry will continue to adapt. The auto retail industry has faced numerous challenges and changes over the last twenty years. The team at Haig Partners recently shared a chart dating back to 1984, showcasing various events, including the savings and loan crisis, the Gulf War Recession, the Great Recession, GM and Chrysler Bankruptcy, COVID-19, the UAW strike, and now tariffs and with it the continued rise in dealership profitability and sustainability.

If I had to pick one trend, however, it's to see how the next generation of dealers adapts to digitization and technology, EVs, and the impacts of the changing political and macroeconomic landscape. And specifically, will they desire to take the business forward and invest in competing, or will they choose something different for their future and not carry on the family legacy?