

Episode 106

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SPEAKERS

Jason Duff, Jeff Reed, Ethan DeLeon

J Jeff Reed 00:00

What's Ohio underrated for? You know, you know, their grit, but also for us, we call that the challenging spirit to respond to challenges with a, with a go-get-'em sort of spirit. And as Mr. Honda said, when we entered our first race, just finish, finish. We got the victory. We got the victories later, but finish the race.

E Ethan DeLeon 00:20

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J Jason Duff 00:40

Hi, everyone. I'm Jason Duff, the founder of Small Nation. Really excited about today's episode. I have Jeff Reed. Jeff is the community and government relations director from Honda. Jeff, it is a pleasure to have you in the studio today.

J Jeff Reed 00:53

Jason, thanks for having me. Really excited to be here.

J Jason Duff 00:55

So this is a really personal story and episode for me today. For a lot of people that have heard me speak on the podcast, I We're based in Bellefontaine, Ohio. Bellefontaine is in Logan County. I live in Union County, which is right next door neighboring Logan County. And thinking back 40 years ago, a lot of things were very different here. We had this deep, rich history of agriculture. We grew corn and soybeans, and that rich history is still here, but there was a massive change. And today we're talking about one of the most important economic development decisions in all of Ohio's history. In economic development, we often celebrate ribbon cuttings, but the real story is what happens after that ribbon cutting 40 years later. More than 4 decades ago, Honda made a bold decision to invest in rural Ohio. What followed wasn't simply the creation of manufacturing jobs. It sparked a whole economic ecosystem that transformed communities, created opportunities, And literally, that has had rippling impacts for generations to come. And so I'm really excited to have Jeff on the show today. I also was talking with him before because I think I've had now 4 CR-Vs over my life. And I just recently upgraded to the Acura MDX, which we were talking is probably one of the most American vehicles you can buy today. And it's made right here.

J Jeff Reed 02:26

So we're going to have a lot of qualifications in this conversation talking about different counties, different plants. But first, to respond to that immediate statement, yes, we make the MDX right here in Logan County. And notably, this is a very special time for us because it has just become public that we actually have the most models in Cars.com's American-Made Index. We have the most models in their top 5. And one of those models is the MDX.

J Jason Duff 02:54

Boom. Do we hear that? And that's a really big deal because I think there's a misnomer just around the country, and maybe even around the world, that because Honda is a Japanese company and based in Japan, that the American automakers have more American parts in their vehicles. That's not always the case.

J Jeff Reed 03:13

Well, especially when you look at Honda. I mean, we always talk about the Cars.com statistic because we consistently rank in the top. But even you look at measures or just facts, Honda being second in the industry in terms of made in America and sold in America, and we're really proud about that American story. And it really speaks to, I think, our discussion today. And even when you talk about how we started in America, and especially what happened here in Logan County, next door in Union County, Shelby County, you mentioned the agricultural history and and corns and beans. And I can't take credit for this. There was a government official, local government official, who once said here in Union County. We grow corn, beans, and cars.

E Ethan DeLeon 03:54

I love it.

J Jeff Reed 03:55

And very proud of how manufacturing came to be a neighbor in this rural agricultural community that really speaks to our story across America. And even when you think about the relationship that employers can have with their local communities, and especially what we have done as a company in the communities where we operate in America, is what that partnership can look like. It can be something as simple as when we started here in Ohio and parts would come over in shipping containers, we would work with our local farmers to pack those shipping containers with soybeans to go back to Japan because of the export-import economy.

J Jason Duff 04:34

Wow.

J Jeff Reed 04:34

And so there's, there's all sorts of unique ways how communities can work with their small, medium, large-sized employers to say, what is the unique factor that you have that you bring to the table for how we can be partners in making society, making this area better for all.

J Jason Duff 04:50

I love that. Honda could have invested anywhere in North America. Why Ohio?

J Jeff Reed 04:56

You want the short answer or the long answer?

J Jason Duff 04:59

I want both. Give it to me.

J Jeff Reed 05:00

So short answer is, number one, the people. Number two, the infrastructure. And this is a true story, the coffee. I'll get to this.

J Jason Duff 05:08

I love this.

J Jeff Reed 05:09

I don't think I knew this. So long, long answer. There's a little history lesson here. So Honda first opened up our operations in America, in California. We had a storefront that we opened up in Los Angeles to sell 2-wheel mobility motorcycles. Coincidentally, inside Honda, we have something called Honda TV. It's how we share our story with our colleagues, with our associates, share company announcements.

J Jason Duff 05:35

Okay.

J Jeff Reed 05:35

Just today, just today, there was a trivia question on what was the first commercial product that Honda had out there. And it was the A-Type. And the A-Type was what Mr. Honda devised in terms of putting a motor on a bicycle. And that motor on the bicycle is what ultimately transformed into Honda being known as a mobility company, starting with what we call 2-wheel mobility or motorcycles. So we knew we wanted to get motorcycles into the American market. But we, we had to be present here. So we had a storefront in Los Angeles to be close to our customers, understand their needs, the problems they have, how we can solve those problems with technology, which is core to the Honda spirit. And we began selling motorcycles in California, in America. And from that experience, we started to gain much more visibility and respect for our products and joy for our products, which is core to the Honda spirit. We want customers to enjoy our products. And what was unique about how Honda entered the market in terms of motorcycles was at that time, motorcycles had a reputation. A bad connotation. Your leather jackets— I ride, so I get it. Look, your leather jackets, and we still love that. We still love that. I wear my leather jacket when I ride. But what Honda did that was different was the way the motorcycles were accessible in terms of the step-through ability to how you step through the motorcycle to ride it, the safety technology on it, and also how we marketed it. Famous marketing campaign, you meet the nicest people on a Honda. And it was through those sorts of campaigns and that education and our commitment to safety that it was actually one half of Harley-Davidson who said, if it weren't for Honda, we wouldn't have motorcycles in America.

E Ethan DeLeon 07:26

Wow.

J Jeff Reed 07:26

Because it really helped it become a more mass product for the— consumers to adopt. But so selling motorcycles here, we realized as time went on, we need to make them here. Again, core to the Honda spirit, we want to make products close to our customers. And so there began a site selection search. You know this, being in real estate, looking for opportunities for where you can build.

J Jason Duff 07:49

Yes.

J Jeff Reed 07:50

And the search was based on kind of key factors in terms of flat land, highway accessibility, nearby airport, but also the people. And so there was a famous gentleman within Honda who really helped start our American Honda operations. His name was Shige Yoshida, and he was the site selection team lead. And number of areas he was looking, and famously what he did— and again, core to the Honda spirit, we'll get into this— is he did something called going to the spot. We don't make decisions from far away. We go to the actual place and we study the situation, and then we make our decisions. And so Mr. Yoshida would go to coffee shops across America. Why? To observe the people.

J Jason Duff 08:36

Wow.

J Jeff Reed 08:37

To observe the people, their happiness, their joy. Do they enjoy what they're doing? Work ethic. And so this goes back to the people, the infrastructure, the coffee is Mr. Yoshida found that here in Central Ohio, There was the property, there was the flat land, the infrastructure notably. And this gets to the key relationship between companies and communities and governments is how we can work together through partnerships to create good infrastructure for what mobility, for what employers need, and for what communities need. But there was the Transportation Research Center, which you know well about.

J Jason Duff 09:12

Yes.

J Jeff Reed 09:12

A 7.5-mile test track that spans 2 counties here in Ohio. That was a vision of then-Governor Rhodes to build to try to attract mobility companies here. And Mr. Yoshida saw that that could be in our backyard. So that's item number 2, the infrastructure. But 3, he sat in coffee shops here in Marysville — or excuse me, next door in Marysville.

J Jason Duff 09:32

Yes.

J Jeff Reed 09:32

And observed the people, observed their happiness, specifically meeting the employees at TRC and seeing the joy on their faces as they did their work, knowing that could be a part of future Team Honda. But in sitting in that coffee shop, he really appreciated the 5-cent coffee. So that's the background in terms of how we got to Central Valley.

J Jason Duff 09:47

That is the first time I've heard that story. And it even just doubles down a lot of the conversations that we have with mayors and leaders in economic development. Sometimes it's not just the shovel-ready industrial park site you have, it's actually the quality of life amenities that your community is able to offer. And the coffee is, is a big piece of that. Could be the local food scene, or, you know, how cold the craft beer is in town. All of those things matter in terms of creating those places for quality of life. And then I love how you mentioned the importance of people, how we're developing our people and preparing our next generation to think about, you know, how they can plug in for careers and jobs and even starting businesses that support the kind of needs that exist in the community. So Honda found Ohio because of those reasons and driving a 2-lane highway of old US 33 from the Columbus ecosystem. They built this plant that started making motorcycles. It was an experiment that through the right marketing, through building quality products, through innovation, took off. Now, how did cars become a reality in, in the region?

J Jeff Reed 11:09

So when you, again, look back to Honda's history, the first automobile that we sold in America was called the N600. We sold it only in Hawaii.

J Jason Duff 11:16

Right.

J Jeff Reed 11:17

And then once the 1970s were coming along, we started introducing the American market. The first model we introduced was the— excuse me, the Civic was the first. And then we had the Accord and Prelude come along. And so we were importing vehicles here. But at the same time, again, you had this track of knowing we want to build our motorcycle products here. And that led to that search. And so that search led to the Marysville motorcycle plant. I'll come back to autos here in a second because autos come into play here. So we had the Marysville motorcycle plant that we started production at. We had our original 64 associates, we call them. The shop in LA had 6 associates. So we start small and start to grow. You'll see a theme here. And at the time when the site selection team was working with Governor Rhodes, They did share that, look, based on this initial investment of starting with motorcycles, there, there could be a future here where we make autos as well. So Governor Rosen knew there could be more to come. And this is a true story. As the first Elsinore rolled off the line at the Marysville motorcycle plant, a fax came through from Japan and it said, proceed with automobile production.

E Ethan DeLeon 12:26

Wow.

J Jeff Reed 12:27

So we, we, we proved ourselves with that initial pilot project, let's call it, and showed the quality of our work and grew to gain more responsibility. And there's actually a funny story behind this when you think about how Honda grew in Ohio and in America and how it started with first those 6 associates at that LA storefront and then from the manufacturing side of things, those 64 at the Marysville motorcycle plant. There's a story that Governor Rhodes, in interacting with our leadership, said, you know, what could this ultimately grow into? And they said, well, look, we could have eventually maybe 1,000 associates working here. And Governor Rose later talking, I think, to the media said, oh, yeah, they'll have eventually 10,000 associates here. So a little—

J Jason Duff 13:11

It takes that vision.

J Jeff Reed 13:13

That's incredible. Exactly. And guess what? Those original 64 here in Ohio alone grew to now our present workforce of 15,000 colleagues that I have here in Ohio.

J Jason Duff 13:22

Incredible. If Honda were making the same decision today, What would Ohio, or maybe even listening to other states, because I know you've expanded all across the, the country and even around the world, but what, what are some of those key elements that you think companies like Honda are looking for when they expand?

J Jeff Reed 13:41

Well, I can, I can speak to my literal experience with this because I was a part of the team that in 2022 announced our new investment in Ohio that included retooling our existing plants for flexible manufacturing, and then also establishing a new plant in Ohio that can produce battery cells for electrified or hybrid vehicles. So there's a whole host of factors that go into it. But I can tell you first and foremost, it is the people. And it is the people in terms of knowing the culture that we have as a company and how we've operated these many decades in America and the products that we produce. From 2-wheel mobility to then 4-wheel mobility, and you look even beyond, and I can get into this in terms of how we spread across America and make all of our products now in America, from powersports to power equipment to the HondaJet, that it's the people who make those. It's the people. The company sets the direction, sets the vision, but it's my colleagues and I working in different states and different realms of the company who make that a reality. And so ultimately, you start with the workforce and the quality of the workforce and that thing that Mr. Yoshida saw decades ago, the happiness and joy that they can bring to our work. Because Mr. Honda himself said, we should be happy making our products. We should be happy selling our products because we want our customers to be happy. So the people. But then you get into those things also that are important for any manufacturing operation, for any company, of things like logistics and infrastructure and utilities. Those are, of course, musts when—

J Jason Duff 15:21

Yes.

J Jeff Reed 15:22

How this future operation could exist. And so really, the principles that existed back in the 1970s when we were looking for that motorcycle plant really haven't changed. But what's core to it is ensuring you have good communications with your local communities, with the regions, with the states, for what the goals are for such a project and how communities and regions and states can help partner to meet those goals. And really, when you look at different communities across America, what are those unique qualities that they have that they can use to their advantage to attract companies and industry that are a fit for their region, just like this was a fit for us?

J Jason Duff 16:03

Well, the evidence of success this week a colleague and I had the chance to participate in Union County hosting the National Rural Economic Developers Association. And I believe you got to give a tour to these 40 or so economic developers that flew in from around the country. And they came in specifically because they wanted to understand in this region what the secret sauce is. And we learned during this visit by different panelists and speakers Union County is now the fastest growing county in the state. We learned about the importance of having housing and finding new and creative ways to keep up with the demand that exists in the Columbus region for housing. And then we also heard innovations in— about rural healthcare. And that one, my ears kind of perked up too, because the kind of needs that our community has There's the traditional inpatient hospitals. There's outpatient services. But we learned a lot about the importance of the whole person. That includes physical health, mental health, spiritual health. All of those things kind of came up. And one thing that I've looked at over the years at Honda, and I remember growing up, you know, 30 years ago when I was young, a lot of the benefits and perks that Honda offered were far better than most other employers in the area. It was about taking care of those people. I know it's harder today competing on the international scale. And so the same perks and benefits, either folks may not be interested in those, or they may be looking for something different. Is there anything when you think about Honda of what it does to support their people that you think is— that other companies could maybe learn from or emulate from?

J Jeff Reed 17:51

When we look at one another as associates, we— not sure if you know this. Well, you probably know this. You've been inside our facilities. We wear the Honda white uniform.

J Jason Duff 18:02

That's right. It's signature to your company.

J Jeff Reed 18:04

Signature. And what's so— the reason why that's the case is threefold. One, safety. It being a white uniform, if you see something that looks awry, you know, okay, there's a safety issue here. We need to address that. The other is quality. Mr. Honda believed that, that for us to produce quality products, the, the process should be quality and clean. And so if, if the Honda white uniform looks dirty, then we should address something in the process. But the third piece, and the most important piece, is equality. That it doesn't matter where you are in the company. It's your ideas that you bring to the table. It's your work ethic. It's Truly, I've lived it. I've seen it. It's the dreams that you have as an associate for how you want to better serve our customers, that bringing those are what matter. And so to answer your question, look, there's the— I'll call them the big 3 in terms of what is great about being a Honda associate in terms of good-paying jobs, great benefits, and stability. We were talking about this a few days ago in terms of seeing firsthand what happens in my own communities where I grew up, what happens when a major employer can close or reduce its workforce and the impact that can have on a community and just families and friends and that stability. That stability piece is so core to us. And so when you have that aspect of knowing you're going to get a job at Honda and have pay on the table, Benefits and that stability allows you to enjoy your work, allows you to enjoy your life. But also that's that piece I mentioned in terms of why we wear the Honda uniform. It's not just showing up to work and just doing your job and leaving. It's you can actually come and make a difference in terms of how we operate as a company, how you contribute to our products, and how you contribute to society. So that's that value added that I can speak for myself. I know you can bring to the company when you walk through those doors beyond those traditional things that you get. In a job. But even maybe one more piece in terms of that stability factor, how we treat one another as colleagues and as associates is even during difficult economic times or during supply chain challenges. Not many people know this, but we have an environment where if for some reason through some external factor we're not manufacturing and we have to pause production, we tell our colleagues, look, You can still come to work and get paid for your job, even if your job is not in operation.

J Jason Duff 20:43

Or no pay, no penalty. I've heard that term.

J Jeff Reed 20:45

Exactly. So you can basically either, you know, use a vacation day, you can stay at home, not use a vacation day, or you can come into work and do your job. Or if your job's not operating, we will find something for one another to do through training, through other needs, and get paid the normal wage you would get paid for your typical day job. And that just speaks to, again, that understanding we have for the value that each of our associates brings to work and giving them and all of us that sense of stability so that you don't have to worry about those things. And it goes back to that initial point I made so that people are happy and joyful when they're doing their job because that extends out into our products and into our customers.

J Jason Duff 21:26

It is about people. And I think those are great examples of what Honda does differently that has contributed to its success. But even more, there's this ripple effect that has happened in the region. And what Honda has really built has actually helped a number of entrepreneurs, industries, businesses thrive in the region. Can you speak to some of those examples that you have seen other industries and companies pop up because of this Ohio ripple effect of Honda being here for the past 40 years?

J Jeff Reed 22:00

There's the, there's the fact-based studies that have been done in terms of the multiplier effect of manufacturers, ourselves included. They've been done on our operations here in Ohio, talking about in terms of the 15,000 associates that we directly employ, the ripple effects of the 100,000 jobs that exist because of our operations. So we can talk about that in terms of numbers, but also just, you and I know from experience, I mean, driving around town and seeing the hotels and seeing the restaurants, And again, from my own personal experience, having— Honda's not been my only career. I had employers prior to Honda and lived in different places across the U.S., but I grew up in a small town here in Ohio. And I didn't know much about Central Ohio because of where I grew up. And when I got here and I saw communities like Bellefontaine and Marysville and Sidney thriving with opportunity and fun things to do and restaurants, I thought, where am I? This is so cool. And I think it speaks to the value of any employer, small, medium, or large, and the services that they provide in the community and how important that is. Going back to my earlier point about good-paying jobs and benefits and stability, what, what any employer can do that can be so meaningful to people, to families, to their friends, to communities, that's what's so valuable. So, again, there's the, there's the facts in the studies, and they're out there in terms of the numbers. But just look at it, and you see it in terms of the fairs and the festivals. That's just so much fun, and that's what gives us joy in life.

J Jason Duff 23:35

The thing I can share, what I see for many of the local businesses, is that Honda and large employers like it, they have needs that come up. Sometimes they're looking for catering that is happening on site at the plant. So that's a great opportunity for a local restaurant or a food truck to step up and fill a gap and need there. The other thing is that there's a lot of contractors that are needed to repair HVAC units, work on electrical projects. And if you think of all the construction companies in the region, many of them based here, Honda does a lot of changes. I mean, as innovation and technology evolves, you change equipment and tear out and need test pits and need new buildings and renovations to existing buildings. So the, the, the whole ripple effect, I will share, I've seen it play out. And one reason why I'm so passionate about this industry is that, um, it's been thriving with that partnership with Honda. And I think for listeners that are listening too, one of the best things that you can do is reach out and build a relationship with those large companies and corporate partners. And I think sometimes there's, there's some fear with that. Do you have any advice for anyone that may be listening saying, I think I have a, an idea, maybe I'm a small machine shop or I have a small business in the region and I'd love to help out that larger corporate partner. What is kind of the path to build those connections?

J Jeff Reed 25:05

So I'd say 2 things. First, I had to smile and I was laughing internally a little bit because I told you I was a part of our site selection team for the battery plant that we have a joint venture on.

J Jason Duff 25:15

Yes.

J Jeff Reed 25:15

That will provide batteries for our future hybrid vehicles that we're going to unveil. And there was a restaurant near that site that I think it was due to pandemic factors coming out of the pandemic that they were actually in a position where they were going to close their operations. And when we picked that site and more and more associates started to be recruited to that site and new employees, that suddenly this barbecue restaurant had more business and they're shipping a ton of barbecue to our associates for lunch. Of course, we're paying for it.

J Jason Duff 25:50

Sure.

E Ethan DeLeon 25:51

Yeah.

J Jeff Reed 25:51

But their business helped bounce back. I've been to it several times. It's awesome barbecue. And I grew up for a number of years in Memphis, so I know my barbecue. And that just speaks to that, again, ripple effect like you talked about. We can talk about the numbers, but you can see it firsthand. In terms of what you described of how do communities work with their employers, again, small, medium, and large. develop the relationship and understand what their goals and challenges and opportunities and unique differentiators are for how they could partner together on making society better, let's call it. We at Honda say we strive to be a company that society wants to exist. We want society to want us around. And We are unique in terms of we're a mobility company, but that's us. And we can work with communities as it relates to mobility solutions. We do do that here in Logan County and Union County through things like the Smart Mobility Corridor and Beta District.

J Jason Duff 26:51

That's right.

J Jeff Reed 26:52

But we're a mobility company. But those same conversations could be had with banking institutions or healthcare companies or startup organizations, or again, businesses small, medium, and large to say, Where are you trying to go as a company? What are your challenges? What are your opportunities? And how can we work together? And come together, sit at the table, share information, and identify what problems exist, how you can work together to help solve those problems, and what are those opportunities that you see in terms of the community's unique needs, the employer's unique needs, and how they can work together to seize those opportunities.

J Jason Duff 27:31

I love that. And I've seen it play out firsthand. The— we talked about chambers like the Union County Chamber, Logan County Chamber. They connect with education partners like Ohio High Point JVS and a number of the area local school districts. Like, building the next generation of the workforce does not happen overnight. And the way that Honda has been innovating with the mention of Jeffersonville and the battery plant and just those partnerships.

E Ethan DeLeon 28:03

What—

J Jason Duff 28:04

how are you thinking and how is Honda thinking about that next generation workforce? I mean, we look in the news and I know all of us are learning about AI and utilizing AI in our own daily lives. And we look at autonomous vehicles. What does that future workforce look like?

J Jeff Reed 28:20

So maybe to pull it back for a second and think about it first from the partnership perspective. And again, those are— Unique identifiers and how you can work together is just to use Ohio as an example, and you know this. We have our partnership. Honda has its partnership with Ohio State University. We work with Ohio State on recruiting, on co-ops, internships, capstone research projects. But even going beyond that, you have the Columbus State partnership, in which we uniquely set up with Columbus State a a kind of. We have a co-op learning program where you can get your degree at Columbus State, go work at Honda for part of that degree, and at the end of that term, both sides can make the decision if, is this a fit? So while you're getting your education, you can actually go work and have that work count toward your schooling credits. So that's on the, let's call it post-high school realm. But even in the K through 12 space, we do partnerships with local schools around getting students excited, excited for science, technology, engineering, mathematics, but then even maybe call them nontraditional schooling institutions or educational institutions, things like COSI, the science center in downtown Columbus that consistently is voted one of the best in the country. We have a strategic partnership with them and even uniquely have a hallway there dedicated to Honda called Meet the Innovators, where we brought in— again, this gets back to that factor I shared earlier — the unique things that we can do from And so, you know, we're talking about ATVs and engines and wind tunnels and having versions of those on display that kids can interact with and get to know what it means to put science into use. And so you can excite people in that space, in the K-12 space, in which you're getting students before they're ready to work interested in the technology, interested in the field. Then you're getting more into a recruiting and retention space through literally the work that you do at the universities. And then once you recruit colleagues and associates, they then can go back to school. We will help pay for this in terms of upskilling. So that's kind of a pipeline way that we look at it. But to answer your question in terms of where manufacturing is going and how that affects our work, using that foundation that I described from the K through 12 and post-high school space, using that, then we can address those needs. And those needs really simply, I mean, look, I could get into the Micro minutiae of things that we need in the manufacturing space, the development space, the design space. But per our culture, it really comes down to maybe let's call them some some macro items in terms of problem solving. First and foremost, can can you can you solve problems? I keep saying this because I live it, and it's core to our our culture is we identify problems. We create technology to solve those problems that make people's lives. Better. So being a problem solver. The second piece is teamwork. Can you work together with others to help solve those problems? One of my favorite stories comes from our, our Anna engine plant next door in Shelby County. That was actually the, the second plant after the Marysville Auto plant that we announced post the motorcycle plant as we evolved here in Ohio. It's now the largest Honda auto engine plant in the world.

J Jason Duff 31:36

That's incredible.

J Jeff Reed 31:37

But when we had a new colleague come on board and serve as a leader at that plant, he would always tell this story around when he saw part of the manufacturing line stop because of a malfunction issue, that he was sitting there waiting for a, let's call it, like, specialist or the expert to come along and fix it. And he's sitting there waiting, and yet he sees the group of associates who are working at that particular process come together as a team and work together as a team to solve that problem. And they did. And so not only did we just, again, solve a problem, but what does that do in terms of camaraderie and pride and also learning new things, diverse learning? And then the third piece as a part of that teamwork is being able to communicate. Being able to communicate, to share your ideas, to share challenges internally. Those are the 3 macro items, let's say, that, that we're looking for in terms of recruiting into the manufacturing or R&D space. And then beyond that, in terms of those more micro items, we work together as those as a team for how we can help upskill associates as necessary.

E Ethan DeLeon 32:50

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J Jason Duff 33:02

Well, I admire the examples that you shared of how early you're starting with experiences at COSI and getting kids involved in understanding engineering and manufacturing and building. And then those partnerships with high schools and vocational schools and universities, like you mentioned. Like, I think it's starting with that next generation. And then I like the idea about solving things with teams. I think a lot of people that have maybe never been to the factory floor to see how much coordination and communication is happening at a given point in time, they would be very, very impressed about how Honda is leading the way with that.

J Jeff Reed 33:40

And when you think about what— why that's so important is because as we go into the future and we have more technology on our vehicles, the work environment changes and the skills that you need for how to do those tasks, they change. And so the more that we can partner with schools, partner with institutions, as society continues to change, as the industry changes, to then say, how do we reflect AI learnings into our skills and into our upskilling? How do we reflect autonomous technology into our processes and ultimately into our products? That foundation is how we get there to then work with the institutions and the schools to reflect those new societal changes into that process.

J Jason Duff 34:28

This area in all of Honda's international ecosystem is pretty special. People often associate innovation with Silicon Valley, but yet some of Honda's most advanced engineering and development is taking place here. Can you speak a little bit about that?

J Jeff Reed 34:49

So probably my favorite example, and we would love to see other states adopt this through a partnership, is what we've done with the state of Ohio in terms of what we call road condition monitoring systems. And what we did, and this goes back to something I shared at the outset in terms of, again, the company shares the big goals and the visions for where we need to get 20 years from now, 30 years from now. But it's the associates, it's my colleagues, it's the teams that help make that a reality through their ideas. And so this road condition monitoring system was an idea that a Honda associate had for how we could equip vehicles with camera technology. They already have the technology. When we think about things like Lane Keep Assist or Collision Mitigation Braking, that's how that—

J Jason Duff 35:39

The cameras are there.

J Jeff Reed 35:40

That's how that safety technology exists. Exactly. And so having those vehicles equipped with that technology, providing them in partnership with the Department of Transportation, which we did here in Ohio, and rather than their team going out and driving the highways and scanning the roadways with their own eyes, which can potentially bring in some own safety challenges because you're scanning for infrastructure challenges versus keeping your eye on the road, how can these vehicles already equipped with that technology capture that information themselves. So this fleet of vehicles that the Ohio Department of Transportation now has in partnership with us is scanning roadways in Ohio, looking for faded lane markings, looking for cracks, looking for potholes, taking that information, anonymizing it, putting it into a database that then helps the Department of Transportation more efficiently address those challenges that exists on the roadway, which saves the state millions of dollars.

E Ethan DeLeon 36:40

And lives.

J Jeff Reed 36:41

And lives, 100%. That's number one. So it's critical in terms of how both entities and how— again, this goes back to communities— how groups can work together to solve those societal challenges. And notably, with respect to that technology, again, it's not just unique to this area. Other departments of transportation could adopt this. And eventually, not sure if it's, you know, what the timeline for this is, but as more autonomous technology gets into the automotive industry, and this goes back to what I shared in terms of things like lane keep assist, that it's the infrastructure that's key to allow that technology on the vehicles to work. And so if we can work more closely with departments of transportation to more efficiently and effectively keep the infrastructure to where it needs to be for that new safety technology to work, It's a win-win for everybody.

J Jason Duff 37:35

I love that. And we'll put in the show notes, you mentioned the Transportation Research Center. We've had a chance to interview Brett, the CEO there, and definitely a deeper deep dive on the partnership in the region for how the Transportation Research Center and Honda has begun, but also a lot more of those innovations, especially with the Beta District and the autonomous technology on 33 and communities around it.

J Jeff Reed 38:03

And I think that gets to what Brett's doing at TRC. And again, Governor Rhodes' original vision is a piece of infrastructure that attracts companies to want to come use it. So while that attracted—helped attract us to have our operations here, there's other mobility companies coming into Ohio to use that space. Again, we talk about multiplier effect. Those companies coming to use that space are going to the restaurants, staying in the hotels. And so—

J Jason Duff 38:27

And I'll be honest, many of those engineers and those employers, not only at Honda, research and development but the TRC. They need temporary housing, they need permanent housing. They're a huge driver of bringing a lot of energy entrepreneurially as well. Some of these employees we know have started breweries in this area, we know have become real estate investors. It goes back to that ripple effect when you bring people into the ecosystem that have a degree in engineering but are bent with an entrepreneurship focus because a lot of this team culture that you're building, you want problem solvers in that the skills of, of, of, of entrepreneurship inherently kind of, you can be an intrapreneur, meaning you can be within a company and have this entrepreneurial mindset. And Honda seems to be this buzz and energy and attractor to for those kind of personalities.

J Jeff Reed 39:23

100%. And I think about technologies like a world-first airbag that a colleague led the development of here in Ohio. It was his idea based on his own life experience around mobility safety. And it won the US Department of Transportation's highest honor.

J Jason Duff 39:38

That's great.

J Jeff Reed 39:38

For this technology. And again, that was an associate who led an idea based on a big goal that Honda has to achieve zero traffic collision fatalities by the year 2050. And so, again, Honda set the big goal, but its associates, its teams working together through their ideas and through innovative practices and through partnerships with, again, things like departments of transportation to help realize that dream.

J Jason Duff 40:02

I know this is really personal to you, not just because this is a job. The work that you do at Honda, the passion and the drive. I've heard you speak a number of times. It's very real for you. And you mentioned that you grew up in a small town and while you were away from Ohio for a little bit, you're back here and you're really excited to be back here doing great things. Tell us a little bit about, like, where you grew up and a little bit of that story of how you ended up in the role that you're at today.

J Jeff Reed 40:30

Well, it's funny. I, I never— you never know what life is gonna, you know, unfold for you. And for whatever reason, my life was taking a certain path and then One day, an opportunity presented itself to work at Honda. And as I look back on life, it's funny. I was born in Indiana. And I told you, I remember about 2 or 3 things there growing up. And one was going to the Indy 500, which Honda has a very winning presence at. We just won the 500.

J Jason Duff 41:01

Big presence.

J Jeff Reed 41:02

Big presence.

J Jason Duff 41:03

Didn't used to, though. That's a newer invention.

J Jeff Reed 41:06

Yes, yes, racing. Racing is a whole other podcast.

J Jason Duff 41:09

OK.

J Jeff Reed 41:10

But then as I looked on and I got a home when I lived in Indiana, my first lawn mower was a Honda. Then when my grandma's car that I adopted in college, when that got to end of life, my first car was a Honda. And this is a decade before I even thought I'd, you know, knew Honda was on the radar. And joined Honda, it'll be 10 years ago this fall. And what's kept me there this whole time is the culture and the people and what we do as a company. It's so cool. I mean, think about this. We, we started— I told you before, I saw on the Honda TV this morning— we started with the A-Type, Mr. Honda putting an engine on a bicycle. Then we got into motorcycles, then cars. We now in North Carolina produce the HondaJet. So we went from putting engines on bicycles to now flying in the skies. And the company did announce several years ago our intentions to pursue space-based activity. And it was just within the past year that we launched our first rocket and landed it. I mean, it's, it's just really cool.

J Jason Duff 42:20

That's incredible.

J Jeff Reed 42:21

And when you look back to the history with Mr. Honda, and from his own words, the difficult challenges that he knew we had to take on, Entering us into races like the Isle of Man motorcycle race, or entering F1, entering IndyCar, and seeing what we've done there as a company—it's it's just awesome. And to know how that started to where it evolved, and I always tell people if I didn't believe it, I wouldn't say it. I live it every day in terms of how we work through challenges as a company, how we identify challenges and problems in society and why we want to solve those to make people's lives better. That's why we do it.

J Jason Duff 43:06

I love it, and I've seen it play out. The other thing that I think is very specific to Honda is how you're helping focus on capacity building in your communities. And I've seen that through Honda's foundation and the way that it gives, particularly here in downtown Bellefontaine, We've had a historic theater that's been undergoing about a 20-year renovation, and Honda stepped up to the plate not just once, but many times to help with grants and money to see that theater restored and to see that be an asset, a cultural asset to the community. The other thing in terms of giving back, that capacity building, a lot of the towns we go into, especially smaller communities, They need more volunteers. There's just not enough people to serve in all the organizations and the groups. And Honda, can you speak a little bit to that capacity building and the work that's happening in communities where Honda is not only giving back of its treasure, but also with its resources of people and time and capacity building?

J Jeff Reed 44:14

I said before that we strive to be a company that society wants to exist. But maybe to put it more simply, we just want to be a good neighbor. We want to be a good neighbor. And we do that, yes, through things like volunteering that I can get into, but also going back again to just basic activities that we do as a company that is as simple as going and knocking on a neighbor's door. When we had our site selection work for our new operation here in Ohio and knowing about our history in terms of how past Honda associates and leaders engaged the local community. I walked around one weekend in our new neighborhood in Jeffersonville and put my business card in the doors and just said, hey, if you ever got a question or a challenge, just call me. We want to be a good neighbor and work through challenges together. But even, I want to be transparent and honest with you that, again, we've also got some great neighbors everywhere where we operate in America. And when we first came to Ohio and to Marysville, it was Scotts Miracle-Gro that's headquartered there that met with us and talked to us about what it's like to work in this community. And so that sort of, again, partnership with businesses big and small and community organizations— very painfully just learned today that in one of our states, a food bank that we support had a fire. They were impacted by that. Thankfully, everyone's okay, but they lost a lot. And so we as a neighbor are stepping up to help them respond to that situation. And it's just because that's what you do as neighbors. You know, you take somebody a meal, you drive them to their job interview, you help them out. And we want to be that, that, that neighbor, whether that's here in Logan County or across our communities in Ohio or, or across America. And so we always provide our opportunities or provide our colleagues, our associates, opportunities to volunteer in areas that help move society forward in terms of mobility for all or improving the environment. One of the coolest things, this happened just a few years ago, you might have seen it in the headlines here, but again, this speaks to this idea of associates being empowered to pursue their dreams in the direction of what the company's big goals are. And knowing that being an environmentally conscious company that we are, we're the most efficient full-line automaker that there is in terms of our engines. We had the first hybrid on the road in 1999, that this colleague of mine had this idea to help with the air, to help with potential runoff issues into waterways. To plant— gosh, I forget the actual number. It was like several hundred thousand trees on our campus here in Ohio to help improve the environment, help mitigate any potential runoff issues into waterways to improve water quality for Ohioans, which, which the governor and leadership here have been huge leaders on. And this was just an associate who volunteered his idea, his time to lead this planting of several hundred thousand trees on our campus that ultimately— and this goes back to the start of our conversation, our partnership with our farming community and our neighbors— that once those trees mature, local farmers can also use to come harvest for maple syrup.

J Jason Duff 47:45

Wow.

J Jeff Reed 47:46

And sell at local farmers markets.

J Jason Duff 47:47

Love that.

J Jeff Reed 47:48

So, you know, decades ago, we're, we're, we're helping our, our neighbors pack shipping containers full of soybeans. And maybe a few decades from now, there'll be, you know, Power of Dreams Maple Forest maple syrup at local farmers markets.

J Jason Duff 48:02

Full circle.

J Jeff Reed 48:03

Full circle.

J Jason Duff 48:04

Strong companies equal strong communities. And I think those, those are always really great. Those are great examples that you shared there, Jeff. Okay. This is one of my favorite parts of the show. We're gonna do some rapid fire. Just off-the-cuff kind of questions. One word that describes Ohio?

J Jeff Reed 48:21

Manufacturing.

E Ethan DeLeon 48:23

Love it.

J Jason Duff 48:25

Favorite Honda vehicle of all time?

J Jeff Reed 48:27

Civic.

J Jason Duff 48:29

I have to ask why.

J Jeff Reed 48:31

It was my first car.

J Jason Duff 48:32

Okay, good, good answer on that.

J Jeff Reed 48:33

2010.

J Jason Duff 48:34

Most underrated strength of Ohio?

J **Jeff Reed** 48:37

Boy. That's a tough question. I, I asked the tough questions. Most, most underrated strength of Ohio.

J **Jason Duff** 48:47

Maybe it's something as you travel around the country, what surprises people?

J **Jeff Reed** 48:51

Our grit.

J **Jason Duff** 48:52

Yeah. Grit. I think grit's a great word. We got grit.

J **Jeff Reed** 48:54

We got grit.

J **Jason Duff** 48:54

Is there a leadership book that you think has been or, or some book that has really transformed you in, in your work that you do?

J **Jeff Reed** 49:02

Well, I was telling one of your colleagues, I, I like listening to podcasts myself, and I'm, I'm an avid reader. I'm reading a bunch of books right now from the same author on the pursuit of happiness and how in your everyday life you can confront challenges and overcome obstacles and acknowledge that there will be days where there's challenges and unhappiness and suffering, but those things happen. And how do you respond to those in terms of helping to bring more joy into the world.

J **Jason Duff** 49:39

I love that. I love that. Do you happen to know the author of that book?

J **Jeff Reed** 49:43

Arthur Brooks.

J **Jason Duff** 49:44

We're gonna have a conversation. So about that, I have— I was an author or a Brooks Institute fellow, and was completely new to Arthur Brooks maybe 3 or 4 years ago. And the more that I dive deeper into his books, the more inspired that I get. And I think America needs more of those messages today.

J **Jeff Reed** 50:04

What's, what's neat about it is, is the, again, kind of the, the undefinable things that exist in terms of how we find happiness, but also the science-based things.

J Jason Duff 50:13

Right.

J Jeff Reed 50:14

And, and he, and he merges those 2 worlds.

J Jason Duff 50:15

Great. Great read. Put it, put a double-click on that. This is kind of a legacy question. When people look back 40 years from now, what do you hope that they'll say about Honda's impact and, and what what it accomplished?

J Jeff Reed 50:30

People. Absolutely the people. I hope that when people look back and see how our operations evolved from that motorcycle plant to the factories we have here in Ohio, the R&D center I didn't even touch upon in terms of the products that they develop, that we build in Alabama and also build right here in Ohio, what we do in the Carolinas, our headquarters in California, the part centers we have from Oregon to Iowa to Jersey. Finance operations, our powersports headquarters in Georgia, is that all of this happens because of the people who come to work, put on the Honda white, put forth their ideas, work together in terms of teamwork to help solve problems that ultimately allows us to exist as a company and provide those products to our customers that make their lives better. That's what I hope people look back on and realize, that in establishing these operations and giving, helping to give people, and those people giving those same people through their work good-paying jobs and great benefits and stability, that that's what changes lives and helps families put food on the table and helps people go volunteer and helps respond to community crises. and opportunities, that all that comes down to people and to use your, again, the what's Ohio underrated for, you know, their grit. But also for us, we call that the challenging spirit to respond to challenges with a go-get-'em sort of spirit. And as Mr. Honda said, when we entered our first race, just finish, finish. Finish the race. We got the victory, we got the victories later, but finish the race.

J Jason Duff 52:16

One more, and this is kind of a personal reflection question. If you think of your younger version of yourself, if a young person is listening today and is deciding whether to build their future in a small town or leave for a larger city, you've done both. What would you tell them?

J Jeff Reed 52:35

Follow your dream, and you do not know where it's going to send you. But keep following your dream and just be open to where it takes you.

J Jason Duff 52:46

Thank you, Jeff. Awesome job today.

J Jeff Reed 52:49

Thank you very much.

E **Ethan DeLeon** 52:49

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