

Back to Basics for Toyota

A new 'Smart Pedal' braking system will cut engine power when the accelerator and brake pedals are both engaged.

By [AKIO TOYODA](#)

The past several months have been humbling for all of us at Toyota. We are taking this experience to heart, making fundamental changes in the way our company does business. I can assure you that our response will be comprehensive.

The first step is taking care of vehicles on the road today. But it also means making even safer vehicles in the future—and being more open and transparent about any safety issues that arise.

Since last June, when I took over as president of the company, I have personally placed the highest priority on improving quality, not quantity. All Toyota vehicles bear my name. When cars are damaged, it is as though I am as well. I love cars, and I take the utmost pleasure in offering vehicles that our customers love. I, more than anyone, want Toyota's cars to be safe, and for our customers to feel safe when they drive our vehicles.

When my grandfather brought Toyota into the auto business in 1937, he created a set of principles that has always guided how we operate. We call it the Toyota Way, and its pillars are "respect for people" and "continuous improvement." I believe in these core principles. And I am convinced that the only way for Toyota to emerge stronger from this experience is to adhere more closely to them.

Toyota continues to produce many of the best vehicles in the world. Many of the customers who are bringing their vehicles to our dealers for repair continue to tell us how much they love our cars, and I deeply appreciate their loyalty.

Yet it is clear to me that in recent years we didn't listen as carefully as we should—or respond as quickly as we must—to our customers' concerns. While we investigated malfunctions in good faith, we focused too narrowly on technical issues without taking full account of how our customers use our vehicles.

Since we began selling cars in the United States more than 50 years ago, Toyota has done many things right. We've built a strong organization with nearly 200,000 dedicated team members at our plants, dealers and suppliers. Over the past two decades, we have won more than 700 top quality awards from various independent experts, among the highest of any auto maker. We've also led the industry in the development of hybrids, and we are investing billions in the development of next generation environmentally friendly vehicles.

Still, I recognize that we must do better—much better—in responding to safety issues.

This is why I am taking the company back to basics. Across Toyota, we are putting our customers, and the values on which our company was founded, front and center.

We have already taken a number of concrete steps. Our dealers and team members across America and around the world are making extraordinary efforts to deal with recalled vehicles quickly and conveniently. Toyota engineers have rigorously tested our solutions. And to further validate the safety of our vehicles, we've asked Exponent, a world-class engineering and scientific consulting firm, to conduct a comprehensive, independent analysis of our electronic throttle control system that we will make public when completed.

We are listening more closely to our customers' concerns, gathering information faster, and responding more effectively when there's an issue. In the U.S., we are expanding our field monitoring team and increasing our use of onboard vehicle diagnosis technology. Our commitment to move rapidly is underscored by the speed at which we recently launched recalls to address customer concerns about the Prius and Lexus HS250 antilock brake systems, which we are well on the way to completing.

More broadly, I am personally leading a company-wide effort to institute more stringent quality control. We've begun a top-to-bottom review of our quality control processes from design to production, sales and service. And we are assembling a group of distinguished independent safety experts to confirm that the enhanced quality controls we're putting in place conform to best industry practices.

As an added customer confidence measure, we also will be one of the first full-line vehicle manufacturers to make advanced brake-override systems standard on all of our new models world-wide, and we will include this new feature on an expanded range of existing models as well. This advanced "Smart Pedal" braking system will automatically cut engine power when the brake pedal and the accelerator pedal are pushed simultaneously.

In short, I pledge that Toyota will set a new standard for transparency and speed of response on safety issues. We also will strive to lead on advanced safety and environmental technologies. And I will continue to personally visit our sales and manufacturing workplaces to reaffirm the Toyota commitment to excellent quality.

President Obama has urged all auto makers to act quickly and decisively when problems are identified. I look forward to speaking directly to Congress and the American people tomorrow about the decisive actions Toyota is taking to make things right for our customers by building the safest vehicles in the world.

Mr. Toyoda is the president of Toyota Motor Corporation.