

# DRIVEN

NORTHWOOD UNIVERSITY  
**CAMS**  
Center for Automotive & Mobility Studies



A periodical from Northwood University's CAMS Research Institute



*Far left: Katrina Ness of Birmingham, Michigan, has been named General Chair of the 2025 Northwood University International Auto Show, which is set for Sept. 19-21, 2025, in Midland, Michigan. Top left, Eddie MacNellis of Midland, Michigan, is the 2025 NUIAS Aftermarket Chair. Lower left, Logan Wilmot of Oxford, Michigan, is the 2025 NUIAS Aftermarket Vice Chair. These students can't wait to connect with industry partners to make next year's NUIAS the best one yet!*

## The Northwood Difference

The Automotive Marketing and Management and Aftermarket Management degree programs give students real-world experience at industry events like AAPEX, NADA, HDAW, and PRI. Another amazing experiential learning opportunity is the Northwood University International Auto Show (NUIAS), which is the largest student-run auto show in North America. Next year's NUIAS takes place Sept. 19-21, 2025. It will be led by:

- Katrina Ness, NUIAS Chair
- Eddie MacNellis, NUIAS Aftermarket Chair
- Logan Wilmot, NUIAS Aftermarket Vice Chair

Experiences like NUIAS and industry event participation help students secure internships that are key to successful careers, which explains why both of these degree programs have a 100% post-graduation employment rate. Additionally, Northwood graduates are uniquely qualified to ensure the automotive and aftermarket industries have a strong base of future leaders!

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## Leadership Spotlight

# Driving Subaru's Legacy of Heart and Impact

By Colin Kubik

Thomas Doll didn't just shape Subaru of America — he redefined what it means to lead with heart in the automotive industry. Speaking recently at the CAMS Industry Summit, Doll reflected on his journey from accountant to CEO, a path that saw Subaru grow into the “love” brand it is today.



**Thomas Doll**  
Former President,  
CEO for Subaru of  
America

Scan the below QR code to view the Leadership Insights event featuring Thomas Doll!



“Branding is everything,” Doll remarked. “Your brand is who you are.” For Subaru, ‘who you are’ means showing up for customers, communities, and the people behind the wheel.”

Doll's Subaru journey began in the early 1980s, stepping into an accounting role during a tough economic period, after which he rose to CFO in 1992. Eventually, he took over as CEO in 2006 with one priority: rebuild Subaru's culture from the ground up. “We were not a nice company to work for,” he recalled, citing low morale and a need for fresh direction. Doll got to work creating a vision based on collaboration, compassion, and authenticity, fostering a culture where employees felt valued, and purpose thrived.

This cultural shift led to the now-famous “Love” campaign, which Doll and his team rolled out in 2008. More than a slogan, “Love” became a movement. Doll empowered Subaru retailers to partner with local charities, translating Subaru's core values into action. “You have to show, you have to show it rather than just saying it,” Doll emphasized. The campaign struck a chord with customers, who found in Subaru a brand committed not only to quality but to community and impact. Doll's advice to young professionals is rooted in that same spirit of resolve and devotion: “You have to obsess over the customer, and the customer experience.”

For students aspiring to make their mark in the automotive world, Doll's journey proves that the best way forward is one driven by purpose, people, and authenticity. Under his leadership, Subaru has shown that a brand with heart doesn't just sell cars — it creates lasting connections.

In an industry often defined by numbers, Doll's legacy is a reminder that the strongest brands are built on the loyalty and trust of people.

*A Marketing Communications student at Northwood University, Colin Kubik hosts an automotive segment on Northwood's student-led Keeping Up with the Pack video podcast. He also serves as Features Editor for DRIVEN.*

## Alumni Spotlight

# Grit is at the Core of Innovation at Lithia & Driveway

By Colin Kubik

For Mike Cavanaugh, grit isn't just a virtue; it's the backbone of his journey through the automotive world. Recognized as a 2022 "40 Under 40" honoree, Cavanaugh is a Northwood University alumnus and influential leader at Lithia & Driveway, where he's dedicated to redefining the customer experience.



### Mike Cavanaugh

*Regional Vice President,  
Lithia & Driveway*

**Graduation:** BBA 2007/  
MBA 2011

**Background:** U.S. Marine  
Corps, two tours in Iraq

**Recommended Readings:**

*Ego is the Enemy* by  
Ryan Holiday and *Atomic  
Habits* by James Clear

**Current Ride:** Land Rover  
Defender Carpathian  
Edition

**Favorite Car:** 1970  
Chevelle SS

From the start of his career, Cavanaugh combined a hands-on work ethic with a deep understanding of the evolving retail landscape, particularly the shift towards digital platforms. Early in his career at Lithia & Driveway, he played a key role in launching the Driveway platform for customers who want the convenience of purchasing a vehicle from home. As Regional Vice President, Cavanaugh manages the Central Region.

Starting in traditional dealership roles, Cavanaugh worked his way up by focusing on one thing: Getting results. Joining the United States Marine Corps and serving two tours in Iraq cemented Cavanaugh's resolve to getting the job done, no matter how hard it is. His path reflects his belief in going above-and-beyond and tackling challenges head-on — a mindset that has shaped his approach to leadership. In his role at Lithia, Cavanaugh continually emphasizes efficiency and customer care, developing systems that respond to evolving consumer demands with an unwavering focus on service quality.

Reflecting on his career and offering advice to industry newcomers, Cavanaugh's message is clear: The bottom line is grit. In a rapidly changing market where technology and customer expectations are always shifting, he believes resilience is the key to thriving. Just like a puzzle, though, there are many pieces that contribute to the bigger picture.

"We have to remind ourselves we're in the hospitality business or we're not going to retain our customers," he advises, encouraging young professionals to seize moments that build genuine relationships. Asking ourselves what customers expect out of an experience fuels true understanding built on the delivery of customer experience excellence.

Cavanaugh's vision is rooted in a tech-integrated, customer-first approach that paves the way for future leaders in the industry. His journey is a testament to the power of perseverance, innovation, and grit — qualities that will continue to drive the automotive retail industry forward.

## Economic Outlook

# Economics, Automobiles and the Road Ahead

*By Dr. Timothy G. Nash*

There is room for both celebration and concern when analyzing the world's No. 1 economy and its automobile industry as 2024 comes to a close.

### Wealth Effect

The average American is much wealthier. According to McNair Center for Free Enterprise calculations, the S&P 500, Dow Jones Industrial Average and NASDAQ have increased roughly 32.46% on average, year over year in November. As a result, stock prices have positively influenced 401K's, pension funds and stock portfolios for the majority of Americans, with recent data showing American homes up more than 5% in value in 2024.

### Headwinds

However, the U.S. economy is facing challenges in 2024 that will continue into 2025. According to the Federal Reserve Bank of New York's quarterly report on household debt and credit, total U.S. household debt increased by \$147 billion in Q3 2024 to \$17.94 trillion. The report notes the second largest item behind mortgage debt is automobile loan debt at \$1.644 trillion. Household debt certainly will surpass \$18 trillion in Q4 and continue growing in 2025. With the consumer accounting for 67.8% of U.S. GDP annually, growing household debt burden seems to be driving a slowing U.S. economy in 2024 and beyond. To make matters worse, overall real U.S. wages have declined by 3.27% since January 2021, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. Another signal that the U.S. economy is slowing comes from an analysis of real U.S. GDP growth over the last four years.

After a post-COVID 5.7% U.S. GDP growth rate in 2021, GDP growth declined to 2.1% in 2022,

2.5% in 2023, and it is currently growing at an annual rate of 2.33% after three quarters in 2024. Standard and Poor's Global is predicting Q4 U.S. GDP to slow to 2%, while the consensus of economists surveyed by Bloomberg forecast 1.9% GDP growth in 2025.

### Signals from the Auto Industry

Historically, average new vehicle inventory at U.S. dealerships is 60 days, according to Cox Automotive. However, Cox reported as of Nov. 4, average dealership inventory has reached 85 days with total vehicle inventory at 3.04 million. This seems to be signaling slowing U.S. vehicle sales unless price breaks and finance incentives are enhanced.

We agree with the Cox Automotive forecast that 2024 U.S. auto sales will likely finish around 15.7 million, up 1.3% over 2023. If auto sales hold, 2024 will represent the best year since 2019. We see 2025 U.S. motor vehicle sales increasing by 1-2%, with lower dealer and manufacturer profits due to enhanced consumer incentives.

### Conclusion

Challenges for the U.S. auto industry in 2025 are a debt-burdened American consumer, a growing \$36 trillion U.S. national debt, the threat of tariffs, and the potential for ending U.S. subsidies in the manufacturing and/or sale of U.S. electric vehicles. A rosier U.S. economy with as much as 1% additional U.S. GDP growth may well result in 2025. For this to happen, President Donald Trump and a bipartisan Congress must cut taxes and implement much-needed regulatory reform. We remain guardedly optimistic they will succeed.

*Dr. Timothy G. Nash is the Director of the McNair Center for Free Enterprise and Entrepreneurship at Northwood University.*



## Toolbox: Thriving in a VUCA World

# How Business Experiments Drive Competitive Advantage

*By Dr. Dave Oventhal*

VUCA; volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous. Does this sound like the current business environment?

When the market is in a VUCA state, leaders can either retreat to the status quo or leverage an environment filled with opportunities. In challenging times, opportunities can provide sources of new business and increased competitive advantages. One way to improve operations, expand business, and stand out from competitors is to conduct business experiments to improve decision making.

Scientists conduct experiments. Athletes conduct experiments. Militaries conduct experiments. How often do businesses conduct experiments? If you speak with leaders from tech companies like Google, Amazon or Meta, every decision is based on results from an experiment. Even Caesars Entertainment runs experiments in every area of the business, not just online. So why and where can businesses of any size implement experiments, both online and offline?

In good times, but especially within VUCA environments, leaders cannot rely solely on intuition and experience for decision making. Human memories are not reliable, and gut instincts are more wrong than right (when not supported by evidence). Unfortunately, human decision making is often influenced by irrelevant factors such as mood, hunger, or even the weather. Business experiments allow organizations to make decisions with higher probabilities of success than merely guessing and hoping for the best. Taking a scientific approach to decision making greatly increases the odds of success.

The goal of a business experiment is to understand which “nudges” are the most effective in different situations. Using a scientific approach of forming, testing, and acting upon a hypothesis ensures decisions are based on evidence rather than solely on intuition or guesses. Experiments help an organization systematically test assumptions and develop a culture of curiosity and openness to new ideas, with the discipline for evidence-based decisions.

Experiments do not need to be grandiose nor expensive. Small, inexpensive experiments can bring high value to any organization.

Five areas where small experiments can be launched are:

1. Marketing programs
2. Sales promotions
3. New hire postings
4. Customer experiences
5. Service protection plans

When designing an experiment, leaders need to abide by the following guidelines:

- Ensure the experiment has a clear purpose and is doable.
- Commit to follow the results.
- Ensure the results are reliable.
- Obtain the most value from the experiment.

Before running an experiment, be sure you know what you want to learn. Then, you can determine if an experiment is the best tool. Conducting experiments allow you to understand what drivers influence behaviors to achieve your goals.

See **BUSINESS EXPERIMENTS** • Page 6

# Aftermarket Leaders Honored With Education Awards

CAMS' Aftermarket team had another successful AAPEX conference in November. More than 20 students attended the conference, many sponsored by industry organizations.

In addition, the University of the Aftermarket honored four individuals with the coveted Automotive Aftermarket Management Education Awards.

Honorees included:

- **Philip Atkins**, Director, Strategic Research and Planning, MEMA Aftermarket Suppliers
- **Tammy Tecklenburg**, Founder and CEO, dott
- **John C. Washbush**, President, Aftermarket Auto Parts Alliance, Inc.
- **Eric M. Johnson**, President and Managing Partner, Arnold Motor Supply



*Pictured from left: Philip Atkins, Tammy Tecklenburg, John C. Washbush, and Eric M. Johnson are the recipients of the 2024 Automotive Aftermarket Management Education Awards. They were honored during AAPEX 2024 in Las Vegas, Nevada.*

In addition, prestigious industry designations from the University of the Aftermarket were awarded. Seven individuals received a Master Automotive Aftermarket Professional (MAAP), eleven received the Automotive Aftermarket Professional (AAP), and five received the Global Automotive Aftermarket Executive (GAEE). The awards continue to showcase the UoA's commitment to furthering the aftermarket industry and developing future leaders.

## BUSINESS EXPERIMENTS | From Page 5

Small, inexpensive experiments are possible in every area of the organization. Start small and have fun. Accept (and learn from) failure. Be disciplined to rely on data rather than solely on intuition or experience. Most importantly, be open to change when the evidence contradicts assumptions.

In the next issue of DRIVEN, we will provide examples of how to use behavioral economics to develop experiments to encourage customers and employees to act, and prompt engagement. Email the CAMS Research Institute at [camsresearch@northwood.edu](mailto:camsresearch@northwood.edu) to learn how business experiments can help your organization use its resources more effectively and efficiently.

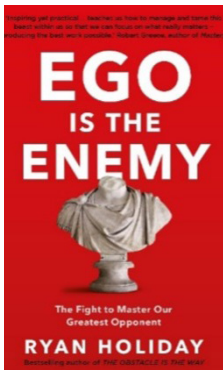
*Dr. Dave Oventhal is the Subaru of New England Professor of Automotive Strategy at Northwood University. He oversees the Center for Automotive & Mobility (CAMS) Research Institute and is Editor-in-Chief of DRIVEN.*

## Recommended Reading

### Ego is the Enemy: The Fight to Master our Greatest Opponent

By Colin Kubik

Mike Cavanaugh, the subject of this issue's Alumni Spotlight, recommends *Ego is the Enemy: The Fight to Master our Greatest Opponent* by Ryan Holiday. With a 4.6 out of 5 stars within Amazon reviews, this is a great read to improve leadership capabilities. This international bestseller, which was featured by the *Wall Street Journal* and *USA Today*, reminds readers to continually ensure egos do not impede the road to goal achievement.



As Holiday notes in the book's prologue:

*"While the history books are filled with tales of obsessive visionary geniuses who remade the world in their image with sheer, almost irrational force, I've found that history is also made by individuals who fought their egos at every turn, who eschewed the spotlight, and who put their higher goals above their desire for recognition."*

*Ego is the Enemy* provides great examples of leaders who achieved great power and success by conquering their egos. As shameless self-promotion is glorified by social media, reality TV, and other forms of media, the book is a great reminder to check your ego at the door so "you will be less invested in the story you tell about your own specialness, and as a result, you will be liberated to accomplish the world-changing work you've set out to achieve."

Holiday shares examples from history and modern times, and sports to politics. Divided into three parts: Aspire, Success, and Failure, *Ego is the Enemy* provides numerous examples of how the ego can hinder growth. This book is a great read to practice humility and master the ego.

## THE ROAD AHEAD: CAMS SCHEDULE AND EVENTS

- **Detroit Auto Show, Jan. 10-20, Detroit, MI**
- **Heavy-Duty Aftermarket Week, Jan. 20-23, Grapevine, TX**
- **NADA Conference, Jan. 23-26, New Orleans, LA**
- **AIMExpo, Feb. 5-7, Las Vegas, NV**
- **Northwood University Career Fair, Feb. 19, Midland, MI**
- **Leadership 2.0 Session II, March 9-13, Hendrick University, Charlotte, NC**
- **Northwood & Stephens Inc. Automotive Forum, April 16-17, Midland, MI**



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## FEEDBACK?

Tell us what you think, what you need, and what you want to see from CAMS. Reach out to: [camsresearch@northwood.edu](mailto:camsresearch@northwood.edu)

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