

Women at the Wheel

Interview with Debbie McIntosh

Debbie is the General Manager responsible for the accounting and controlling function of BMW UK and Ireland.



How did you get your start in the automotive industry?

I fell into it. I was working at KPMG in Audit when a former manager asked me to interview with BMW. Since then I've worked across the organisation, in both South Africa and the UK, in Corporate Finance, Corporate Planning, and Sales Channel Development, CRM - and now I'm back in Finance.

What is your favourite part about working in the industry?

I love the dynamism and the challenges it brings. Change is constant – just think about the development towards autonomous driving, electrification and Brexit... and in the meantime, we still need to sell cars!

What do you think is the most significant barrier to female leadership in automotive?

Women are capable and tenacious, but don't have enough self-belief.

Did you have a mentor or sponsor?

I don't have a singular person, I have a number of mentors and sponsors who are now based around the world. I believe you can develop and grow from the insights of different people and you can, and should, learn from everyone. I also believe in 360 degree feedback. As you get more senior you need to reflect, actively, on your day: has your day represented who you are?

What advice would you give to develop those kinds of relationships?

My advice would be to leverage your existing network. Find people you can relate to, people you believe are inspirational and motivational. And then have a coffee! Tell them what you want to do and sell yourself. This means you need to know what you're good at and not good at – this is not a weakness, you can't know everything.

Who are the industry's future leaders?

Our future leaders will have different requirements and ways of working from our leaders today. Our next leaders will need to instil a culture where employees are adaptable, innovative, collaborative whilst remaining responsible and accountable. Within automotive we attract great talent but need to work harder on retaining it. I would challenge the industry to be sustainable and remain relevant.

Why are you excited to be participating with Women at the Wheel?

I'm most excited about everything I'm learning. There are brilliant, inspiring, and passionate people involved, with great ideas and new ways of doing things – which is contagious. It's a great opportunity to grow.