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OVERVIEW

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History

SECTION 3: Moving into the Future

SCENE SETTER

The key to continuing prosperity is to move with the times. History is littered with the bones of those who tried to prevent progress, and failed. As the world leader in steam propulsion during the 1860s, for example, Britain might have expected to pioneer many of the automotive advances that in fact were made on continental Europe and in America over the following decades. But British railroad and stage-coach companies recognized that the automobile was a threat to their future, and lobbied for the notorious red flag laws. These prohibitive laws, which insisted every self-propelled vehicle be preceded by a pedestrian waving a red flag, were on the statute books for years. By the time they were repealed, Britain had missed a huge opportunity.

In America, on the other hand, threatened transport companies became automobile companies, adapting their existing know-how to the challenges of the new industry. As a result, the American automotive industry boomed.

The world's going to change, whatever we do. The key is to be prepared for that change, whenever and however it comes. The electric car, for example, has been debated and promoted for more than a hundred years. But never before has a government insisted on zero emissions, California's has. Similarly, the greatest market in the world within the next thirty years may well prove to be in the Asia-Pacific rim, rather than in North America. We have to be ready for these and other changes. We have to embrace them, and work with them, before others do.

Companies that don't progress, that simply watch their products or service mentalities become obsolete, will themselves soon become obsolete. That won't happen at Dana. We're not invincible but we're strong. I say this with confidence, because strength comes from people, and Dana people are the best.

Fall and rise

In the 1960s and 1970s, when the Dana Style first emerged, some skeptics believed that giving people responsibility and power was fine in theory, but that it couldn't actually work for the bottom line. Now barely a week passes without some self-appointed management guru "discovering" what Dana has been proving for decades.

It's people that count. Numbers are just there to be counted.

The incontrovertible truth of this was finally brought home to the leaders of the American automotive industry by the heavy losses they incurred through the recession of the early 1990s. For too many years, the Big Three had been competing against each other, focusing on annual model changes and horsepower, while ignoring the trend toward small cars.

At the same time the dollar was growing too strong against the German mark and Japanese yen. Imports were consequently getting cheaper and cheaper, until finally they were out-performing domestic cars on quality, design and cost. Things got so bad in the United States that sales were