



Lee Iacocca: An Italian American Icon By Danielle Vassos

Lee Iacocca was larger than life. This giant of the automotive industry had an enormous personality, enormous ambitions, and an enormous impact on our nation and culture. Despite his big reputation, Lee Iacocca came from humble beginnings. Emulating the fortitude of his Italian immigrant parents, he built his career from the ground up. After attaining a degree in engineering, Iacocca began working at Ford Motor Company, and rose through the ranks to become the president of the corporation (Encyclopedia Britannica).

During his career at Ford in the 1960's, Iacocca developed the Mustang, an iconic car that defined a generation of drivers. The vehicle's ideal combination of style, fun, and affordability made it wildly popular among Americans of all ages and backgrounds. With more than \$2.8 billion in sales, Iacocca's Mustang has had the greatest impact on the American economy of any car produced after World War II (Ford Corporate). The Mustang is a timeless symbol of our nation and remains a classic vehicle today.

Despite Iacocca's invaluable contributions to Ford, he was dismissed from the company in 1978. He refused to let failure slow him down. He was soon hired as the CEO of Chrysler, a bankrupt corporation in desperate need of rescue (Encyclopedia Britannica). Iacocca was ready for the challenge. He believed Chrysler was worth saving because it was integral to the U.S. economy. He used this rhetoric to secure a federal loan of \$1.2 billion to help rebuild the company (Knowledge at Warton). Iacocca reduced his salary to one dollar per year and cut costs wherever he could. He formulated new advertising strategies to turn Chrysler around. His iconic message to the American public, "If you can find a better car, buy it!", renewed interest in Chrysler's vehicles and increased profitability like never before (Lehigh University).

As a result of Iacocca's "can-do spirit", the loan was repaid seven years early and Chrysler's success was restored. This statement from Chrysler exemplifies the lasting impact of Iacocca's leadership: "Lee gave us a mind-set that still drives us today — one that is characterized by hard work, dedication, and grit. His legacy is the resiliency and unshakable faith in the future that live on in the men and women of FCA who strive every day to live up to the high standards he set," (Denham).

Throughout his career, Iacocca championed patriotism. He encouraged driving domestic vehicles and preached a powerful message of American pride (Denham). Iacocca extended this attitude beyond the automotive industry, leading the restoration of the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island. He felt honored to help rebuild the historic landmarks his parents immigrated through over sixty years earlier (Lehigh University). As Iacocca once said, "Your legacy should be that you made it better than it was when you got it." He undoubtedly fulfilled this promise. Intertwining the American spirit and the immigrant spirit, Lee Iacocca embodied our country's strongest values. His determination, innovation, and integrity taught us how we should do business and who we should strive to be.



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