Gearing Up with Ashley Samuel – the new NADA Account Director

1. Let's start with the person behind the title — who is Ashley?

Tell us a bit more about your background, your journey so far, and what drives you professionally and personally.

I'm a Durbanite by birth, a strategist by training, and an optimist by nature. My journey has taken me from the world of printing and technical training to the dynamic universe of industry advocacy. Over the years, I've worked with stakeholders across the board — from small businesses to major corporates — always focused on creating meaningful connections and tangible impact. What drives me professionally is the thrill of transformation: helping people and organisations realise their potential. Personally? My wife, two sons, daughter and granddaughter keep me grounded, curious, and occasionally exhausted — in the best way possible!

2. If you could define your leadership style in three words, what would they be — and why those?

Give our members a sense of how you approach relationships, challenges, and big-picture thinking.

Empathetic. Strategic. Unflappable.

Empathy helps me listen beyond the noise — to really understand people's challenges. Strategy gives me the roadmap to help solve them. And "unflappable"... well, when things go sideways (and they sometimes do), you'll still find me with a plan, a smile, and probably a bad pun. I believe leadership isn't about knowing everything — it's about creating an environment where good people can thrive and innovate.

3. What's at the top of your priority list in your first 100 days as NADA's new National Director?

We'd love to hear more about your early focus areas and the impact you hope to make.

Three things: listening, aligning, and delivering. First, I want to engage directly with members — not just in boardrooms, but in dealerships and workshops, where the real stories are told. Then, aligning NADA's strategy to reflect what I'm hearing — ensuring our priorities aren't just relevant, but responsive. And finally, delivering some quick wins: resources, partnerships, or even just clarity on key issues. I want members to feel that NADA is not just "there," but there for them.

4. The motor industry is evolving rapidly. What excites you most about where it's heading — and where does NADA fit into that future?

Help our members understand your vision for NADA's role in this changing landscape.

We're at a turning point — with EVs, digitisation, and shifting consumer behaviour shaking up the landscape. What excites me is the opportunity for reinvention.

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NADA can be the trusted co-pilot in this transition: equipping our members with insight, advocacy, and the tools to adapt. Whether it's helping decode policy shifts, navigating compliance, or unlocking new business models — our job is to make sure no one gets left behind because they didn't have the right support.

5. Relationships are at the heart of any association. How do you plan to engage with members and strengthen their connection to NADA and the RMI?

Practical steps or philosophies you bring to the table?

I'm a big believer in "coffee, not just conferences." Engagement should be ongoing and personal — not just reactive. I'll be hitting the road, visiting members, being accessible, and building trust the old-fashioned way: through conversation. On a practical level, I'm looking at fresh communication channels, bite-sized updates, and making feedback loops tighter. It's about removing the mystery and adding value — consistently and clearly.

6. And finally — a fun one. You're a Liverpool FC supporter and an Alfa Romeo enthusiast. If you had to compare your leadership approach to a football manager or a car model, who or what would it be?

(Let's see where passion meets personality!)

Tough one — but I'd say I'm a bit of a Jürgen Klopp meets an Alfa Giulia Quadrifoglio. Klopp because I believe in passion, people, and the power of belief. I'm not afraid to roll up my sleeves and lead from the front — with heart. And the Giulia? Well, it's stylish, unexpectedly powerful, and handles change like a dream. Plus, just like me, it prefers the scenic route now and then — as long as we're still moving forward at speed!

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