

# STEM

# SPOTLIGHT

PROFESSIONAL: LEE GILLILAND

**NAME:** Lee Gilliland  
**COMPANY:** AutoZone  
**TITLE:** IT Systems Specialist

**DEGREE/CERTIFICATION/SPECIAL TRAINING:**  
N/A

**Q: How did you select your college major, certification program, or career path?**

**A:** I attended University of Memphis for 4 years, but didn't finish. When my 8 semester scholarship was over, and I looked at all my friends with Student Loan payments, I decided to join the workforce instead of completing my degree. It has always been in the back of my mind to finish, and now I am attending Union University at night to complete my degree.

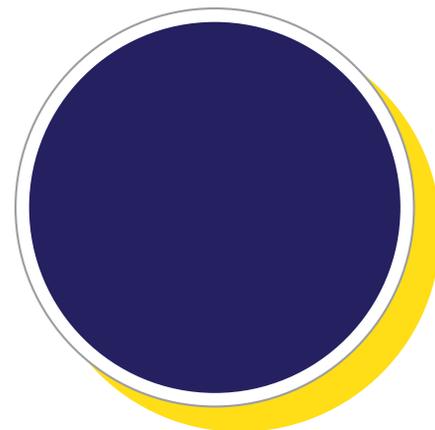
When I attended University of Memphis, I studied Advertising in the Journalism department. I had always been creative, and I saw it as a natural pairing of the creative and business worlds. Now that I am going back, I am pursuing a business degree.

**Q: What was the biggest influence in your selection of career path?**

**A:** My family was a family full of musicians. At an early age, I gained an appreciation for the arts, and was always focused on performing. When I got to college, I got interested in advertising and all the creative aspects that went into that. After joining the workforce, I ended up working a lot in Nashville. The luster of the music industry had started to wear off the older I got. I was working as a National Event Promoter and Director and ended up working on the company website. All of a sudden, I found myself in Information Technology, and I was hooked. Since then, I have worked in IT for large Fortune 500 companies, and I am fascinated by how large corporations plan and execute their technological goals. Now that I have decided to return to school to finish my degree, I have learned that a solid understanding of business, finance, and management are essential to my career and I chose a business degree as the best way to do that.

**Q: If you could go back to high school and select any elective course to take that would have better prepared you for college/career, what would it be?**

**A:** If it were possible, I would try to find some type of Conflict Resolution class in high school. Perhaps I would join the debate team. So many times in the professional world I find myself in interpersonal situations that call for a firm foundation in communication and negotiation skills. Learning and practicing these skills early in life would be tremendously helpful in the business world—yes, even in Information Technology.



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**Q: What is your favorite aspect of your job?**

**A:** The freedom and empowerment to affect change for the better on behalf of the enterprise. As a Project Manager, I get the opportunity to lead excellent initiatives that are innovative and add a great deal of value to the company. Once a project is finished and a product is in production, it is a wonderful feeling to look back and be proud of the progress and see that product impacting the business.

**Q: How do you/your company make a positive impact on society/our community?**

**A:** AutoZone has an excellent community-involvement focus. AutoZone employs more than 80,000 individuals in the United States, Mexico and Brazil, and a significant number of people here in Memphis. Our Downtown location sits right on the river and houses hundreds of employees, impacting a lot of the Downtown action and economy. Throughout many of its programs, AutoZone gives so much back to the Memphis community that we care for greatly. Part of our pledge at AutoZone, is that we care about people. That statement goes far beyond the walls of an AutoZone store or our Downtown Store Support Center. Through support for Arts Memphis, Mid-South Food Bank, Lifeblood, the Salvation Army, and many more, AutoZone is committed to improving the quality of life, not only for Memphians, but for communities across the nation and the globe.

**Q: What's the most interesting thing you have been able to do in your career?**

**A:** What we are doing now at AutoZone is very interesting. I do a lot of work with Mobile App development and we are exploring lots of cutting edge development opportunities all designed to improve the experience of our customers. It is truly amazing the ways that technology is being used in the marketplace today.

**Q: What makes you get up each morning excited about your profession?**

**A:** Each day is a new experience. The way technology is so rapidly changing makes each new day an adventure to learn something new and keep in sync with all that is happening in the world. Being a part of a great team helps a lot too. I work with so many talented IT professionals and we are always teaching each other something new.

**Q: What advice would you share with K-12 students who are considering your profession?**

**A:** There are a lot of options out there for a professional career. Explore them all. Try lots of different things, but try early. Once you have found it, always be prepared. Technology moves so fast that you have got to be ready to grab hold and hang on tight for the ride. Build the foundation now that will give you the best opportunity to succeed.

