



ARLETTE: Hi, I'm Arlette, your host, and welcome to "Give Me an H."

Together we'll explore the culture of The Home Depot through the eyes and experiences of our associates who live it every day.

Let's get started.

Doing the Right Thing - Crystal Hanlon



ARLETTE: Crystal Hanlon is president of the Northern Division at The Home Depot.

She is responsible for the sales and operations of 795 stores in 24 Midwest and Northeastern states with a team of more than 110,000 associates.

During the last 30 years, she had held numerous positions, including customers services manager, assistant store manager, store manager, district manager, senior director of operations, merchandising vice president of décor, regional vice president of the Midwest and regional vice president of the Gulf Region.

So Crystal, part of the magic of your story is that you didn't want to work here.

CRYSTAL: You're totally right, Arlette. When I started with the company, I just needed to make ends meet, and I needed a job to pay for my schooling.

ARLETTE: Now, I understand that.

CRYSTAL: I was going to be a physical therapist. I was going to school at University of Houston. I basically just went into Home Depot one day looking for a job so that I could pay my bills. I never planned on making it a career.

You know, back in those days, people used to talk about "orange blood" and all these things. I was like, "Whatever. I have no idea what orange blood is. I just need my paycheck."

Then, you know, somebody took an interest in me – assistant manager named Butch Moody, who just loved what he did every day, and he started to teach me the culture of the company and teach me what it meant to be “orange blooded.” It really resonates with me as a person, because it’s all about taking care of our people and giving back.

It showcases the values that we were founded on. You really find meaning in life, because it’s the same thing outside of Home Depot: what you do, doing the right thing, taking care of people, making a difference for others. That’s truly what we do at Home Depot, and that’s what makes us so special.

ARLETTE: Talk to me a little bit about how you see our values being lived every day.

CRYSTAL: You know our values are alive and well when you think about the projects that we do for Team Depot.

Team Depot is a group of individuals that go out on their own time and help in communities to make the lives of others better. Whether it be a veteran’s home, a wheelchair ramp for a handicapped individual, it truly is a way to give back to our communities.

ARLETTE: It’s really one of the best aspects of being “orange blooded.” I agree with you wholeheartedly. It is amazing to see our associates give their own time in order to support the communities.

CRYSTAL: It truly is. Our people do it, not because they have to. They do it because they want to. That’s what makes Home Depot great.

We also have the Homer Fund. The Homer Fund is a way that we can help our other associates, like if they’ve been impacted by a fire or a hurricane or just need help, and it is a way that we can give to each other in those times of need that are outside of their control.

ARLETTE: You know, what’s great about the Homer Fund is that associates actually support each other by giving to the Homer Fund. So, not only did our founders start the fund many years ago, since then, it continues to stay alive because our associates believe in each other as a part of our “orange family.”

Can you give an example of when you’ve seen the Homer Fund at work?

CRYSTAL: Absolutely. You know, I get so many different examples day-in and day-out about associates that have struggled. One that comes to mind is that an associate lost his home in a fire, and he couldn’t make ends meet. He really needed help.

He reached out to the Homer Fund, and we helped him to where he could survive and rebuild his home and made a difference in his life. To hear the stories of the people that we’ve helped, it touches your heart, because in that time of need, to know that we were part of making it better for them, it really makes a difference for you as a leader. It

really makes you feel like you work for a company with great meaning, because nobody else out there does that.

Home Depot is the only company that has a Homer Fund and really cares about our people. It shows in every way that we give back.

ARLETTE: Well, and to me, when you talked about "bleeding orange" at the beginning, that is obviously what it means—to "bleed orange," to be a part of a family, that takes care of each other.

CRYSTAL: Absolutely, "bleeding orange" now. I mean, I can't even believe I used to make fun of it back when I first started in orientation. The fact is, I "bleed orange" today, 32 years later, and it's because we work for a company that does have meaning and brings us together and takes care of each other.

There's no greater way in life to live your career than to make a difference in those lives, and that's really what "orange blooded" is. You know, I love it and I teach it to this day. I'm fully committed to the "orange blood."

ARLETTE: Well, said.

Now, you've spent your career in stores. Now, I personally started as an intern in the Store Support Center many years ago. But your career has been amazing to watch, because you've spent a lot of time in various functions but also in our stores.

Talk a little bit about the exciting careers that are out there.

CRYSTAL: You know, when I started with Home Depot, like I said, I never planned on staying. And I have grown up through the Company.

The opportunities that I have had to learn how to run a business, how to look at things differently inside of an organization... I mean, Home Depot allows you to learn so many different aspects.

Whether it be Merchandising where you want to learn how to sell products or it be Operations where you want to learn how to really control shrink or different avenues of the business from an operational perspective. You know, it teaches you a lot about leadership, "How do you make a difference and really be a great leader for the people?"

When you think about the avenues that I've taken, every time I've been very uncomfortable, I've learned the most. To learn along the way through mentorship and training, and you know the company provides so much of that. That allows you to really grow. You know, I thank God every day that I came into Home Depot because I had no idea what this company offered. So, that's what's so great about the people within Home Depot. Ninety percent of the leadership team started in the stores as associates. I started as a cashier.

ARLETTE: Now, I love stories like yours. You hear all the time about leaders that started in the lot or started as a cashier or maybe came over as a supply chain associate, but have grown with the company.

When you think about how long you've been in retail, what are some of the changes in retail that leaders like yourself are having to evolve with? What's the new age of retail, if you will, that the store leadership teams are adjusting to?

CRYSTAL: So, really I'm excited about today's world at Home Depot because we can serve our customers in so many different ways; whatever way they want to shop. Whether it be in our stores, online, our Services Organization.

Our Install Business is very strong now. If you think about our Pro Business and the growth that we've had with our Pro Organization. A customer can basically pick up anything they need, any way they want to shop, at any given time now.

You know, our delivery models, we can get things next day to the customer, which we've never been able to do. We have grown so much in that. So it's really an exciting time to be with Home Depot, because you can learn all the different aspects to service the customers' needs.

ARLETTE: One of the great things about our culture is what we call Women in Leadership, and you've been an important leader in Women in Leadership in making sure that we are continuing to evolve.

When you started 32 years ago, there probably were very few women in the Home Improvement Industry. Talk to us a little bit about what you see, in terms of where we were and how we've evolved over time in terms of our diversity in the organization.

CRYSTAL: It has completely changed now. When you think about our leadership teams, we reflect our communities. Nowadays, when you think about it, 85 percent of the decisions in a home are typically made by a female.

ARLETTE: That's true.

CRYSTAL: Our job is to reflect that in our leadership teams and making sure we have mentorships for female leaders, and it is a big movement for us. We've come so far from 32 years ago. It's amazing.

ARLETTE: You know what? Whether you're talking about our customers, our suppliers, or our associates, it is so important for us to, not only embrace diversity but also practice inclusion.

We have to be open to those various perspectives, and so your description of the evolution from (let's say) when you started 32 years ago to today and how we have evolved and how diverse the population and the leadership is absolutely consistent with our approach to targeting our customers and making sure we are valuing them and valuing our associates. So, I agree with you 100 percent.

Now, tell me what a favorite day is like at The Home Depot for you.

CRYSTAL: You know, I love what I do. I get up every day loving what I do. The real reason is because every day I make a difference in somebody's life.

ARLETTE: That must be a great feeling. When I think about the fact that you've worked all over the country, and so when you get a chance to do that, that must be pretty exciting?

CRYSTAL: It really is. When you go out to the stores and you walk with our associates and you see somebody that started as a cashier that's now a store manager or a district manager, or a lot associate that's now an assistant manager or a store manager, it's amazing the feeling it gives you to know that you gave back by teaching and training an associate and making their lives better. Because they get promotions and it really equates to them taking care of their family and friends.

ARLETTE: It sounds like the things that resonate with you are the things that Butch Moody poured into you 32 years ago?

CRYSTAL: It truly is, and I've had so many mentors along the path that have made such an impact in my life that have helped to teach and train me.

You know, when you think about us as a team, the only difference between Home Depot and every other retailer out there are the hearts of our people. Our people come together. We care about each other, and we try to grow together to make a difference. Not only for ourselves, but for our communities, our customers, and our associates.

You know, it gives you great meaning to work for a company that really values and cares for people.

ARLETTE: Thank you, Crystal.

And thank you for listening.

This is Arlette signing off.

I hope you'll join us next time for another episode of "Give Me an H."