



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.

Merchandising Innovation and Career Growth –Jeff Kinnaird



ARLETTE: Jeff Kinnaird is Executive Vice President of Merchandising at The Home Depot.

He is responsible for all store and online merchandising, our e-commerce business, marketing, vendor management, and the in-store experience.

With a rich history at The Home Depot, listen in as we talk about his 25-year career journey, his approach to career growth, and how he continues to challenge himself every day.

Now, Jeff, tell us about how you got your first job at The Home Depot in 1996.

JEFF: Arlette, well, first of all, thank you for having me.

Thrilled to be here, and, yes, 25 years ago, July 2nd, I started with The Home Depot.

ARLETTE: Wow.

JEFF: Celebrated my 25th anniversary this past week.

ARLETTE: Well, congratulations on that.

JEFF: Thank you so much.

ARLETTE: It's amazing.

JEFF: Truly humbling.

ARLETTE: I worked for a small home-improvement retailer on the West Coast of Canada.

The company was Windsor Plywood, and they had about 60 stores, and I was young and excited about the company.

And then I met a gentleman named Mike Campbell.

ARLETTE: Okay.

JEFF: And Mike was an associate working alongside of me, and Mike spent six months convincing me to apply for The Home Depot.

And at the beginning, I pushed back and I said, "Wow, I'm really comfortable" and I could see the future.

At one point, I said I'm going to make the change and I'm going to take on the challenge, so I got in line at 5:00 in the morning in the Vancouver Home Depot, and those were the days where you didn't have a cellphone.

ARLETTE: Sure.

JEFF: There was no -- It was all paper résumé and paper application.

ARLETTE: Had your newspaper ad.

JEFF: Yeah, exactly.

There was over a thousand potential associates in line.

ARLETTE: Oh, wow.

JEFF: And I got hired.

My associate number is 704200003, so I was the third hired in that store.

ARLETTE: That's amazing.

JEFF: Yeah, couldn't be more proud to have started as a lumber associate in our stores.

ARLETTE: You know, I love hearing these stories.

High level -- Give us a sense of your career path with The Home Depot starting with that first position at the Vancouver store.

JEFF: Yeah, first of all, Mike now works for Home Depot, has worked for Home Depot for over 20 years.

ARLETTE: Okay.

JEFF: Every time I take on a new responsibility, I give him a call and say thank you.

ARLETTE: And thank him. [Laughs]

JEFF: I mean, we're all thankful for those that helped us along the way.

Arlette, I started in the lumber department, lumber associate on the pro desk, where our professional contractors, our pro customers come to work with an associate.

By the way, at that point in time, the desk as 2 1/2 feet by 5 feet and was on wheels.

ARLETTE: [Laughs]

JEFF: It had a whole stack of paper, but it started there, and then had my first real taste of a leadership role as the department supervisor.

ARLETTE: Ah, yes.

JEFF: And then as an assistant manager in a store, and then, in 1999, I became a store manager.

ARLETTE: Ah, I started in 1999.

JEFF: Yeah.

And I really got a sense of the store-manager role.

I mean, it is the coveted role in Home Depot.

It really is.

ARLETTE: Absolutely.

JEFF: You are responsible for so much.

And then I was promoted to district manager.

ARLETTE: Okay.

JEFF: In 2000, 2001.

ARLETTE: And so now you go from one store to how many stores as a district manager?

JEFF: At the time I had eight stores.

ARLETTE: Okay.

JEFF: And then upwards of 11 stores as I moved through my three years in role.

And then, in 2004, I had the opportunity to become an RVP.

ARLETTE: A regional vice president.

JEFF: Yeah, regional vice president.

And then, in 2011, a gentleman the name Bill Lennie -- Bill Lennie was a great mentor of mine, still is today.

ARLETTE: Yes.

JEFF: Made me the merchandising vice president for Canada, where you have all aspects of merchandising, again, just in a much smaller scale.

ARLETTE: Sure.

JEFF: And then, in 2016, I became the president of The Home Depot Canada, and --

ARLETTE: Wait, wait.

JEFF: Yeah.

ARLETTE: So, hold on.

In 1996, you had to be convinced to come to apply, and now you're the president of The Home Depot Canada?

JEFF: Yeah, and I phoned Mike, for sure.

ARLETTE: Oh, my gosh.

JEFF: Actually I took Craig Menear, our CEO, to meet Mike.

We presented him an executive award.

ARLETTE: And how many stores at that time in Canada?

JEFF: 180-plus, 182 stores.

ARLETTE: Wow.

JEFF: For those of you that know the business in Canada and Mexico, it really is smaller versions of the U.S. business.

We represent the brand exceptionally well but had the autonomy to run the business how the business needed to be run for the customers we were serving.

ARLETTE: Sure.

JEFF: And I think that's one of the competitive advantages Home Depot has operating in different countries.

ARLETTE: Mm-hmm, thinking about that local customer.

JEFF: It really is having the autonomy to take care of the customers in the local market, and the team has just done an amazing job.

ARLETTE: So, now, as the Executive Vice President of Merchandising, coming into this new role, certainly you transitioned countries, you transitioned roles all during the pandemic.

So tell me a little bit about what that's been like.

JEFF: Yeah, one, I'll say it's -- I say this a lot.

It's a marathon, not a sprint.

You know, I'll tell you, it is really our culture, our values.

The inverted pyramid of this company resonates across the entire organization.

So that's made it a lot simpler.

It doesn't matter where you're from in -- in -- in the company.

ARLETTE: Mm-hmm.

JEFF: But there was a welcome environment created.

It's just been a great onboarding.

In a lot of cases, virtually, but in person, as well, so...

ARLETTE: When you think about the culture, whether you were in Canada, or now that you have taken on this role in the U.S., what stands out most for you about the culture?

JEFF: One is -- is -- is, obviously, our value wheel.

It is amazing how the values resonate through the organization.

ARLETTE: Right.

And so those are our eight core values, aren't they?

JEFF: Eight core values.

And -- And we all live those values.

ARLETTE: Yes.

JEFF: And that -- And I think we're attracted to the organization because we live those values even before The Home Depot.

ARLETTE: Mm-hmm.

JEFF: That's just who we are.

ARLETTE: Yes.

JEFF: And then second is the inverted pyramid, and the inverted pyramid is really our version of servant leadership.

The customer is at the top of the inverted pyramid, our associates are the second layer in the inverted pyramid, and the CEO and the leadership team is at the bottom of the inverted pyramid.

ARLETTE: And you know what's so compelling about the inverted pyramid?

That's been in place well past 40 years in existence.

JEFF: Yeah.

ARLETTE: And Bernie and Arthur thought of that more than 40 years ago.

JEFF: Yeah, and Arthur had just a great presentation with Craig...

ARLETTE: Mm-hmm.

JEFF: ...a few months back, and talked a lot about just being the foundation. The foundation isn't going to change. That foundation can't change, and -- and it won't change.

And then I'd say, third, I had a discussion with a group of new associates, the new leaders to Home Depot.

ARLETTE: Uh-huh.

JEFF: And they said, "Wow, I -- I love the culture of The Home Depot."

ARLETTE: Mm-hmm.

JEFF: And I said, "Well, how do you --"

ARLETTE: I know, yeah.

JEFF: "How did you get the culture of The Home Depot? You're working virtually."

And the answer I got back was, you know, one, "Culture is the work I'm doing for our customers and our associates."

ARLETTE: Mm.

JEFF: And it's the right work. It's about "serving our customers and our associates."

And then, second, it was, "The team I work for."

ARLETTE: Mm, so, the team --

JEFF: "The team I work for defines the culture."

And then third was, "It's the leader I work for. The leader I work for represents the culture of this organization."

ARLETTE: It's always interesting, we spend a lot of time talking to associates and getting their perspectives through our town halls and skip-levels, and it's such a big part of our culture.

Even as they're just coming into the organization, clearly, they felt that Orange heartbeat.

Now, for you, when you say "merchandising," maybe give a little sense of what that entails and maybe how you've navigated merchandising over the last several months, considering the pandemic.

JEFF: Yeah, at the highest level, it's driving innovation and value for our customers, being on trend, accelerating change in terms of the work we're doing in the marketing space and the online space and interconnected omnichannel retail.

It's around taking care of the customer and customer pain points and all that we do to make it a simple buying process for our customers.

It's all of that, but the top of the house, it's -- it is really setting the competitive position of the company.

ARLETTE: Tell us a little bit about -- about the innovations, perhaps, that you and the team are bringing to bear, partially because of the pandemic but also just as you think about the business going forward.

JEFF: Yeah, and I think of the change to curbside.

I mean, how we thought like a start-up organization...

ARLETTE: Yes.

JEFF: ...through the pandemic and just how we serve our customers.

And we -- And we learned a lot and we've applied a lot.

ARLETTE: Mm-hmm.

JEFF: And as I think about product, I'm thrilled that we have not lost a step in developing innovation for our customers.

Like scuff-resistant paint from Behr.

It's -- It's life-changing.

ARLETTE: I need that. I have two boys.

JEFF: If you -- If you have two boys and you have a hallway...

ARLETTE: [Laughs] Yeah.

JEFF: ...or a staircase, you need Scuff Defense.

It's being incorporated into all of our major lines in the Behr product lineup, and it is life-changing in a flat finish, which people love a flat-finish paint.

Second, I'd say that just the lithium technology in portable power...

ARLETTE: Power tools.

JEFF: ...outdoor power, power tools...

ARLETTE: Yes.

JEFF: ...and outdoor power is just incredible.

The new Ryobi lithium-powered lawn mowers...

ARLETTE: Mm-hmm.

JEFF: ...are -- have taken off and just incredibly well this year.

And then I just spent the last hour, I went through the -- the Halloween and decorative holiday showcase.

ARLETTE: Oh, gosh.

JEFF: And the 12-foot skeleton was a huge hit.

ARLETTE: [Chuckles] Yes, it was.

JEFF: We have the original skeleton, and now we added the 12-foot Inferno Skeleton...

ARLETTE: Oh, my goodness.

JEFF: ...which is going to take the market by storm, not to mention just an incredible assortment in the decorative holiday season.

I think you're going to see...

ARLETTE: Uh-huh.

JEFF: ...so many customers come back to get even more decorative holiday products...

ARLETTE: I love it.

JEFF: ...with the holiday season this year.

ARLETTE: Sure.

JEFF: And it really is the power of The Home Depot.

We didn't sell anything...

ARLETTE: Uh-huh.

JEFF: ...decorative holiday or Halloween 10, 12 years ago.

ARLETTE: That's right.

JEFF: We sold trees -- live trees.

And it's a category that -- that has really exploded.

ARLETTE: Well, and our customer told us they wanted us to be in that business.

JEFF: Absolutely.

ARLETTE: And we responded.

Now, through all your roles, when you shift gears from kind of the -- the business proposition, the strategy, and the incredible products that we bring to bear, what's the greatest lesson that you would say you've learned in your career?

JEFF: That's a hard question.

It's out on the sales floor. It's helping a customer when you're uncomfortable.

ARLETTE: Ah.

JEFF: And pushing yourself to serve a customer better.

ARLETTE: Uh-huh.

JEFF: And sell them the whole project to --

ARLETTE: Because that orange apron means something to a customer.

JEFF: It absolutely means something. It's about the knowledge we provide.

ARLETTE: Uh-huh.

JEFF: And it's trust.

ARLETTE: That's right.

JEFF: And then it's about a store-manager role and being uncomfortable holding your first all-store meeting.

ARLETTE: Mm.

JEFF: And it's about being the president of a division...

ARLETTE: Uh-huh.

JEFF: ...and holding your -- your first all-SSC meeting...

ARLETTE: Uh-huh.

JEFF: ...or leadership meeting.

ARLETTE: Sure.

JEFF: And so I guess it's -- the theme I'd give you would be just, it's okay to be uncomfortable.

And it's okay to put yourself in uncomfortable positions, because that's when you learn and that's when you develop.

And that's what I'd say is my learning throughout my career, I -- I continue to find ways to put myself in uncomfortable positions where you learn.

ARLETTE: And it seems like you're still applying that today...

JEFF: Yes!

ARLETTE: ...looking at the fact that you made the transition from Canada to the U.S.

I appreciate those words. Those resonate with me, for sure.

Now, what words of advice would you give to our listeners when they think about challenging themselves?

JEFF: I think there is -- there's the importance of self-reflection -- this ability to reflect on how you did at a particular activity.

What I do is I will try and measure myself.

ARLETTE: Oh.

JEFF: If it's daily, weekly, it's just having a quiet time...

ARLETTE: Mm-hmm.

JEFF: ...to reflect on what I did well and what I would do differently.

ARLETTE: Right.

So, kind of informal, but measurement nonetheless.

JEFF: Yeah.

A long time ago, you could probably -- especially in retail...

ARLETTE: Mm-hmm.

JEFF: ...you could do things the same and you could -- and you could improve results.

ARLETTE: Okay.

JEFF: My view today is, if you -- if you do things the same -- if you continue to do things the same, you'll lose momentum.

I think that's in our business, and I think that's as leaders, that's as associates.

ARLETTE: That's such a great call-out that you could apply that thought process to the business but you could also apply it to our individual journeys, so...

JEFF: Yeah.

ARLETTE: You know, the -- the one thing that is pretty common to these discussions is that culture continues to be such a big piece of who we are and how we engage, whether it is with our customers, with our associates, with our suppliers.

And so, for my last question for you, you got to tell me, when you think about our culture, think about your 25 years, what's your favorite day at The Home Depot?

A day that makes you say to yourself, "25 years ago, I'm so glad I stood in that long line. This is why I love working for The Home Depot."

JEFF: Well, one day is really hard to choose.

ARLETTE: [Laughs]

JEFF: Or that I -- I enjoy the days I spend working in stores, helping customers, associates.

I enjoy the days we have giving back.

The one day I -- I really enjoy --

ARLETTE: Yeah, your favorite.

JEFF: A favorite day is actually earnings day.

ARLETTE: Ooh, that's a good one!

JEFF: And earnings day is a great day for the company.

And it's four times a year, and I like earnings day because part of our earnings is success sharing.

ARLETTE: Yes.

JEFF: And that's our way of giving back to our associates.

ARLETTE: Mm-hmm.

JEFF: And we've just had an incredible run in success sharing.

And then, too, part of that day is just the career opportunities that our company offers.

You know, you think of the success of Home Depot and how that is, in essence, just so many incredible career opportunities.

ARLETTE: I agree with you.

It definitely gives us the opportunity to reward associates for a job well done.

And of course, I would say, you are a great example...

JEFF: Thank you.

ARLETTE: ...of what it means to start a career with the company and how we have the opportunity to continue to grow.

So, congratulations on the new role.

Starting in the lumber aisle, and now today you are the Executive Vice president of Merchandising, Marketing, and Online.

JEFF: And, Arlette, thank you for having me on your podcast.

ARLETTE: Thank you.

Today, as the Executive Vice President of Merchandising, Jeff's thoughtful and reflective style continues to guide The Home Depot to offer the most innovative product assortment, while at the same time create opportunity for our associates.

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."