



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.

## Human Resources and Work-Life Balance — Arlette Guthrie



TERESA: Welcome to "Give Me an H." I'm Teresa Wynn Roseborough, executive vice president, general counsel and corporate secretary for The Home Depot. And for this episode, we're flipping the script.

Today I'm interviewing Arlette Guthrie, your official "Give Me an H" podcast host, who is usually the one asking the questions during these interviews.

Arlette is senior vice president of Human Resources at The Home Depot. I have known Arlette for many years and count her as a close friend, and I'm excited to be able to bring her interview to you today.

Arlette, welcome to "Give Me an H."

ARLETTE: Thank you.

TERESA: How does it feel to be on the other side of the interview table?

ARLETTE: I'm still trying to figure that out. Definitely different, but I'm excited about it.

TERESA: Oh, come on. Everybody dreams of being interviewed by a lawyer. So, tell us about how you started working at The Home Depot.

ARLETTE: That was almost 22 years ago. I was actually finishing a PhD at Texas A&M University, and interviewed with The Home Depot at a career fair in 1999. Probably 30, 35 minutes in, I thought, oh, this is going well, and was offered the job on the spot.

So, I started as an intern with the Selection and Performance Team at The Home Depot, which was very focused on designing tests and other assessments for hiring at the company way back then.

TERESA: Do you remember what you heard in that 1999 interview that made you want to work at The Home Depot?

ARLETTE: You know, I didn't know a lot about the company at the time, but what I did hear was a focus on the associate. Putting associates first.

And so, when you - when you're, you know, young and impressionable and you're trying to figure out where to go, it was an easy, easy match, and certainly every day since then has delivered on the expectation and more.

TERESA: So, you've been at The Home Depot for 22 years...

ARLETTE: Yes.

TERESA: ...but in a lot of different roles. Can you just walk us through your path from your starting days at The Home Depot to where you are today as an SVP?

ARLETTE: I have been very fortunate to enjoy an exciting career, from my standpoint at least, I'm biased, at The Home Depot, but certainly have spent all of my time in Human Resources.

And so, I started designing assessments for the company, and then moved into what we consider to be change management and performance management. And then moved into org design and executive development.

Over the course of about the first five or six years of my career at The Home Depot, I focused on a very specialized HR area. And then the opportunity to become an HR Generalist, along with some other specialist responsibilities. And then, I think in 2013, I left the world of specialist behind and became a Generalist full time. Of course, I supported you at the time.

From there moved into supporting our merchandising, marketing, online businesses. And most recently added our stores to my areas of responsibility.

And so, it's been super exciting. I cannot tell you how much I've learned along the way. It wasn't that I was experienced in talent acquisition, it wasn't that I was experienced in executive development, but I had an interest, a curiosity, and I think that's one of the great things about our company.

You always see this opportunity for movement for associates when they have a new interest.

TERESA: So, you've been in an interesting seat. As you've been thinking about how to help Home Depot associates learn and grow in their careers at The Home Depot, you've also been learning and growing along your own career.

ARLETTE: Yes.

TERESA: Can you talk about some of the things that you did internal to Home Depot and external to Home Depot to progress your career?

ARLETTE: So, one of the things that I've learned within the organization is that it is super important to, first and foremost, deliver excellent customer service.

We know that customer service is job one within our organization. That just gets you to the party. Whether we're talking about our external customers or our internal customers and partners, I think exceeding expectations and delighting the customer is one of the things that I've found as a foundational element for moving my career.

In addition to that, I do believe that adaptability is so important for all of us. I mean, the business is constantly changing.

You start in one place, but as the macro environment changes, how you evolve becomes important. And so, for me I think it's been very important to continue to evolve and reinvent what I'm bringing to the table. But also, even what HR is as we support the business.

When I think about externally, I also have found it to be important to just stay connected with a number of different peer groups just to make sure that we're sharing best practices and continuing to grow. And so, it's kind of that right mix of internal and external. The journey has been a blend of the two.

TERESA: So, as you mentioned, you and I met on my very first day...

ARLETTE: Yes.

TERESA: ...at The Home Depot. I was a new officer of the company, and you were charged with helping me with new leader assimilation.

ARLETTE: Yes.

TERESA: Helping me to learn The Home Depot. Tell me, how did you approach taking someone who was a complete newbie to Home Depot and making them a part of The Home Depot family?

ARLETTE: You know, we tend to have this infectious orange-blooded, you know, excitement about being a part of this company, and I always want to kind of share that with others. One of the things that we know is our bread and butter, our heartbeat, is in our stores, and in our contact centers, and in our distribution centers.

So, it's super important as a part of our process that we also give you first-hand experience to put on an orange apron and engage with customers. Whether that is in a store or on the phone in the Contact Center, that gives you real insight into why we come to work every day.

TERESA: I'd say you also made those early days at the company fun because you helped me see all the excitement that's part of The Home Depot. And both learning its past and where it was going in the future.

ARLETTE: You think about some of those early experiences like going to a Team Depot event. Of course, Team Depot is where we as an organization come together to support the community. There is nothing like seeing 100 orange shirts in the middle of a park doing something to change the experience for the kids in that community.

We who bleed orange, to use a common phrase here, we know what that feels like, but to give that experience to someone else, especially someone new walking into the building, I think changes the dynamic and creates that emotional connection.

TERESA: So, you've recently been promoted to SVP.

ARLETTE: Yes.

TERESA: Which is a recognition of your leadership talents and skills. Can you tell us what your leadership philosophy is?

ARLETTE: To me, leadership is inspiration. It is inspiring others to do things that they didn't even think possible.

For me, leadership really is about how you serve others in order to expand the capabilities, not only of the individual, but also of the team.

TERESA: In your years at The Home Depot, you've obviously met and worked with a lot of different people. Do you have a role model?

ARLETTE: I like to pull from a number of different leaders.

Certainly our Executive Vice President of Human Resources, Tim Hourigan, is my boss. But also just a great leader. I've learned so much from him. Tim is the loudest voice in the room when it comes to taking care of our people.

And that, for me, is so important when you think of being a Human Resources leader in a retail company that is successful. Knowing that our associates have a voice at the table, I think is such an important element, and so I do take that from him.

I will call you out, don't be embarrassed, but I would also say you. I mean, I love the fact that as a General Counsel, you have a lot of difficult decisions to make. You're often in the middle of challenging situations, but it doesn't change the positivity that you bring to the table.

Your approach is one that I always keep in mind. It's like, okay, even though you have something challenging to do, you can always approach it with humility. You can always approach it with humanity. You can always approach it in a way that continues to keep being positive and pushing forward, and trying to get to a workable solution.

Debbie McKinley is another person. She's one of my direct reports and has this phrase of unconditional high regard, and I love that, which basically means that you give people the benefit of the doubt. You assume positive or good intent.

Kandi Watson is another one. Kandi Watson is my administrative partner. She and I spend a lot of time together. I love her standard of excellence. But even more than that, her willingness to take care of people. She always goes the extra mile.

I could probably continue this list for hours, but I think the bottom line in all of that is, for me, it's nice to be able to have a number of different role models at different levels of the organization to take all of these positive attributes from so many and really think about how I want to show up.

TERESA: You called out some great things. Being a champion of our associates. Having a positive approach to challenging situations. Treating people with unconditional high regard. Assuming people come to work with the right intent and with a desire to do good. Not turning away from challenges.

What do we call all that? Is that Home Depot magic?

ARLETTE: Ooh, that's Home Depot magic. That is a perfect phrase for it.

Think about it. Somewhere in the neighborhood of 30,000 leaders across stores, our store support centers, our corporate offices, our distribution centers, our contact centers, our services branches. More than 30,000 different ways to bring leadership to life.

But we have a common set of core values that unite us. For me, that is what I mean when I say Home Depot magic. You can trust that your leaders will do the right thing. That your leaders will allow you entrepreneurial spirit to think creatively to deliver excellent customer service. You can trust that the decisions that we have to make will be focused on doing the right thing.

This has been an incredible year, but the North Star for us has been taking care of our associates. Taking care of our customers. Taking care of our suppliers. And for me, that? there's nothing like it.

There is no other place to be other than at The Home Depot because you can count on us living our values every day.

TERESA: You know, I always love the stories, people who tell about the moment they were at Home Depot, and someone put their hand on their shoulder and said something to them that they remembered years later as something that so motivated them and made them feel connected to Home Depot and let them know that they had what it took to be successful.

I mean, I heard someone the other day say that she remembers the moment that someone told her that she was assiduous. She didn't know what that meant. And she ran home and looked it up, and it means someone who is willing to persevere. Who's willing to keep working through her problem until it's resolved.

And she was so delighted to say that someone saw her in that light as someone who had the power to work through a problem and to keep working at it until they solved it.

ARLETTE: Yeah.

TERESA: Those stories give you goose bumps when you hear them.

ARLETTE: Words matter, right? So, people hang onto words. People hang onto the insight that you're giving them as they think about navigating their careers.

I remember Dennis Donovan, who was our executive vice president of Human Resources some years ago. I remember having a conversation with him because I was an industrial and organizational psychologist working on designing tests. I was working away. I was a specialist in HR. And I remember him saying to me, "If you want the big job someday, you gotta be a generalist."

And he said, "And I believe you can do it." And that, for me, was eye-opening because whatever my narrow view of my capability was at the time may not have led me to this path, may not have given me the insight or even the confidence to pursue the broadening of my career opportunity as a generalist.

TERESA: You know, that type of recognition of having someone tell you that they've paid attention to you...

ARLETTE: Yes.

TERESA: ...that they've noticed what you're doing. And that they have confidence that you can do more.

There's nothing more powerful that you can give to someone as a gift to help them progress their careers.

ARLETTE: Absolutely.

TERESA: In addition to your responsibilities at Home Depot...

ARLETTE: Yes.

TERESA: ...you're also married and have two wonderful boys.

ARLETTE: I do.

TERESA: Max and Jaden. And, of course, it's a constant question for professional women of how do you make it all work. Whether you call it work-life balance or work-life juggling...

ARLETTE: Yes.

TERESA: ...but how do you make it all work?

ARLETTE: Whoo! With a lot of sweat, and tears, and what -- No. You know, first of all, I do believe you have to start how you want to finish. I always hear the term work-life balance. I'm more a believer in work-life integration, which is trying to make the two intersect wherever they can.

And so, one of the tools that I try to use on a daily basis is one calendar. I don't have a calendar for the kids. I don't have a calendar for home and my husband. I don't have a calendar for work. I have one. Because you can only be in one place at one time.

I try to ensure that I'm thinking holistically about everything that I'm trying to accomplish. And you don't always get it right, but it's an ongoing evolution.

And for me, being willing to, you know, cry uncle when something needs to shift, I think all of those things coming together has helped me to be able to manage what is definitely a very, very, very full schedule, but I wouldn't trade it.

TERESA: Ah, that's great. Well, what do you do when you need to de-stress and step away?

ARLETTE: So, de-stressing. I love being creative, so it's one of the things that makes me happy is being able to purge and reorganize spaces.

So, I have a number of friends that will call me and say, okay, can you come do something with this pantry? Look at this closet. And I get so much joy out of just taking a space that didn't seem like it had possibility and transforming it.

TERESA: You know, when you're thinking on -- on yourself and how you want to represent yourself to the world, do you have a favorite quote or something that you look to for inspiration about how you want to be seen in the world?

ARLETTE: I do, I do. "To whom much is given, much is Required."

I do believe that we're here to serve, and that feels like a pretty big responsibility.

TERESA: That's wonderful.

Now, Arlette, I know that when you do "Give Me an H" interviews...

ARLETTE: Yes?

TERESA: ...you have a favorite question that you like to end on.

ARLETTE: Yes.

TERESA: And it is, what is your favorite day at The Home Depot? The day that makes you say, that's why I love working here.

ARLETTE: That one is so easy for me.

You know, 22 years into it, as an HR professional, nothing brings me more joy than the day an associate gets promoted. The day an associate gets a new assignment to grow his or her career. There's so much excitement in that.

Why? First and foremost, it shows growth to move through the organization, but also I think about the family that's impacted. The new opportunity that it just created because that person moved out of the space they were in so now another associate can grow by moving into that role. It's a continuous chain.

And what I love about Home Depot, we have so many examples of cross-functional movement.

So, I may start in merchandising but end up in Human Resources. Or I may start in the stores but end up in the store support center. The reason why that's so important is because we are continuing to provide opportunity. We're continuing to create ways for associates to take care of themselves and their families, but also to continue to be a part of this orange culture.

And so, that's easy, easy, easy answer. The other great thing is I get to experience it every day.

TERESA: Arlette, thank you so much for being with us today and thank you for allowing me to turn the tables on you. Oh, my gosh, no one can fill those shoes! But it was great to have the opportunity to try.

ARLETTE: It's been very interesting sitting on this side of the desk, but I appreciate the opportunity.

Thank you, Teresa.

TERESA: We've been talking to Arlette Guthrie, SVP of Human Resources, who's been with The Home Depot for 22 years. Starting just out of college, she's taken every challenge as an opportunity to learn and excel.

I'm always encouraged by Arlette's great smile, her positive energy, and her passion for our associates. Who better to help steer Human Resources at The Home Depot as we continue to innovate, rise to life's challenges, enable our associates, and support our communities?

Thank you for listening.



This is Teresa Wynn Roseborough standing in for Arlette Guthrie during her interview for "Give Me an H."

Arlette will be returning as host once again for the next interview. Thank goodness.

I hope you'll join us next time.