



GE APPLIANCES IS THE FIRST APPLIANCE COMPANY TO OFFER SOFTWARE UPGRADES THAT ALLOW APPLIANCES TO GET SMARTER AND MORE PERSONALIZED OVER TIME.

A HUMAN APPROACH TO DOING BUSINESS

GE Appliances is creating value for its employees and customers by putting people first.



SINCE 2016, GE APPLIANCES, THE U.S. LEADER in home appliances manufacturing, has been working to transform the ordinary, transactional, and often unidirectional strategy to selling appliances. The Kentucky-based company is bringing consumers and employees together through its human-first approach to business.

“We want to be known not just for what we do, but how we do it,” says president and CEO Kevin Nolan. “That starts with people—from those ideating and building our appliances to those who put their trust in us to buy our products.”

According to Nolan, management scientist

James F. Moore’s “human ecosystems” mindset inspired this strategy. His philosophy views a company as an ecosystem, where all parts work together to strengthen and build each other up to create and deliver value.

“With an ecosystem mindset, we’re motivated to get outside the building and find communities and partners that can help us learn, react to, and serve every person through co-creation,” he says. This model ultimately will help the company achieve its goal of “zero distance,” which means getting employees as close as possible to product users in order to understand their needs and invent the right solutions.

For example, when Nolan received a letter from a consumer frustrated that a GE Appliances’ cooking device was difficult to navigate for visually impaired users, he invited that customer to FirstBuild, the company’s Louisville makerspace and co-creation center, which Nolan cofounded, to understand more about this customer’s challenges using the product. After hearing this feedback, GE Appliances partnered with local web development company Interapt and the American Printing House for the Blind, a Louisville nonprofit that promotes independent living for people who are blind and visually impaired, to collaborate on several recommendations to improve the user experience for customers with

similar needs. Those changes are now being implemented.

“Having the ecosystem model means our employees don’t have to be experts in everything. We can focus on being the appliance experts,” Nolan says. FirstBuild engineers recently put this expertise to practice when they partnered with barbecue professionals. After listening to that industry’s unmet needs, the engineers built an indoor barbecue smoker that’s now headed for production.

In fact, the company is so committed to the co-creation concept, it is opening a new center dedicated to it. In the fall of 2021, GE Appliances announced it was constructing CoCREATE Stamford: part manufacturing facility, part community makerspace and design complex, and part experience center. The new operation, based in Connecticut, is designed to “blur the lines among innovation, education, and inspiration.”

When the center opens this year, creatives of all types will be invited to collaborate with engineers on new ideas. This is a space where customers who order certain appliances can be present during their assembly, talk with those who are building them, and co-create on their specific features.

These are the kind of initiatives shaping GE Appliances, and they radiate out across the entire GE operation. Company leadership has removed organizational barriers and bureaucratic, top-down decision-making by promoting internal transparency and encouraging employee autonomy. Meetings that were historically only open to leadership have become accessible to each employee, and all workers are, in effect, their own bosses.

“My role as CEO is to help GE Appliances professionals seek out their own answers and to provide the tools to enable their growth,” says Nolan. “If our customers or employees have an idea or passion, our company is a platform for them to bring it to market.” As a result, curiosity, creative energy, and passion projects at the company thrive. For instance, a group of employees who embrace outdoor living recognized a boom in RV sales. They saw an opportunity and established alliances with RV industry leaders, catapulting GE Appliances into an untapped recreational living portfolio with its newest microenterprise—a.k.a., an independent,

employee-led business.

Today, GE Appliances is focused on becoming the number one ecosystem appliance company in the U.S. by making life easier and better for people across the country. The company is already proving that this transformation is possible: GE Appliances is forging partnerships that bring the community to the table to co-create product ideas and help give those ideas life and

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**KEVIN NOLAN
PRESIDENT AND CEO, GE APPLIANCES**



GE APPLIANCES PRESIDENT AND CEO KEVIN NOLAN SAYS THE CO-CREATION CONCEPT IS FUELING NEW IDEAS AND INNOVATION.

is empowering employees to discover their passions and work on projects they genuinely love. Product lines are accelerating and microenterprises are fast-growing, too, says Nolan.

“When you do what you love, and do so with passion, the extraordinary happens,” Nolan says. “And that passion allows us to blow open the doors to creativity, to innovate better, and to foster an overall closer connection to the people we serve.” ■



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