

The Evolution of HR

An Interview with **Jacqueline R. Williams-Roll**,
Senior Vice President, Human Resources, General Mills

COMPANY BRIEF General Mills (generalmills.com) is one of the world's leading food companies, operating in more than 100 countries around the world. Its brands include Cheerios, Fiber One, Haagen-Dazs, Nature Valley, Yoplait, Betty Crocker, Pillsbury, Old El Paso, Wanchai Ferry, Yoki, and more. Headquartered in Minneapolis, Minnesota, General Mills had fiscal 2015 worldwide sales of US \$18.7 billion, including the company's US \$1.1 billion proportionate share of joint-venture net sales.



Jacqueline R. Williams-Roll

EDITORS' NOTE Jacqueline Williams-Roll joined the company in 1995 and has held human resources leadership roles in Supply Chain, Finance, Marketing, and Organization Effectiveness. She has worked a large part of her career on businesses outside of the United States. Those roles include an assignment based in Switzerland in which she led human resources for Europe, the Middle East, and North Africa, and as Vice President of Human Resources for the international segment. Prior to her current role, she was Senior Vice President, Human Resources Operations for General Mills International. Before joining General Mills, she held sales and management roles with Jenny Craig International.

How do you define the role of an HR leader today?

There is no better time to be in HR than right now. There is more change now than we've ever experienced as a function.

At the center of the plate, our job is to translate business strategy into a talent organization and a cultural strategy that enables our business to win.

The role has evolved to be more strategic. In the past, it was seen as more transactional – we're now expected to come in with a point of view, and not just on HR issues but for the business. We are expected to have a lot of influence, not just on talent and organizational strategies but on our business strategies – that is probably the biggest shift I've seen.

Is there a good understanding among the talent pool about the type of innovative career that General Mills offers?

Our goal is to have a workplace and an environment, as well as an overall proposition where people can come here and truly maximize their full potential.

Our challenge is always to create an environment that makes a big company feel like a small company. We have a series of brands and businesses that give us a lot of flexibility to allow employees to be very entrepreneurial in their roles, but also take advantage of the scale and opportunities that a company like General Mills can provide.

For a very long time, we have had a rich history of employee development. It's not an option to stop learning here. Being a big company, we have many different opportunities at our disposal to help employees maximize their full potential.

Are we moving toward providing the necessary opportunities for women?

There is certainly room for improvement. Nationwide, only 14 percent of U.S. C-Suite executives are women. I think many would agree that we haven't made the kind of progress we need to make.

It has to be an integrated and continuous dialogue across the organization. At General Mills, over half of our workforce are women; close to 40 percent of our officers are women; and one-third of our board is women.

I believe diversity and inclusion starts with leadership; we have to track and measure it, and we need to have good programming. Men have to also be advocates for the cause. We offer a Women in Leadership network at General Mills, which is made up of senior leaders – both male and female – who are committed to advocating for new opportunities, roles, and development for women throughout our organization. ●

Serving the World by Making Food that People Love

An Interview with **Kimberly A. Nelson**, Senior Vice President-External Relations, General Mills and President-General Mills Foundation



Kimberly A. Nelson

EDITORS' NOTE Kim Nelson assumed her Senior Vice President, External Relations role in September 2010, and leadership of the foundation in June 2011. Previously, she was Senior Vice President/President of the General Mills Snacks Unlimited division. Nelson has been a corporate officer of General Mills since 2000. Her career spans leadership roles for brands including Cheerios, Yoplait, Nature Valley, Wheaties, Helper, Old El Paso, and Chex Mix. Nelson has an M.B.A. from Columbia University and a B.S. from Georgetown University.

What are the key areas of focus for the General Mills Foundation?

We focus on hunger and nutrition wellness, on improving education particularly in our hometown markets, and on strengthening communities. We have also been a major funder of United Way for many years.

Beyond our actual giving, General Mills employees are actively involved in volunteer opportunities through the foundation. For example, we have employees engaged in food bank networks, in volunteering to read to children, and sitting on nonprofit boards throughout the Twin Cities.

The other thing that is unique about our community engagement is our focus on skills-based volunteerism.

Does the foundation's work align with General Mills' business?

It is absolutely aligned. We are a very purpose-driven company, and have been for many years. We recently restated our company purpose as, "We serve the world by making food that people love."

Serving the communities where we do business is ingrained in our ethos and really resonates with our employees.

What does sustainability mean to General Mills?

Sustainability is the notion of protecting and preserving the resources that we use to run our business, so they are there for future generations. As a food company, it's essential that we are actively engaging to reduce our environmental footprint, because we need these resources.

Are the opportunities available to women today in the workforce and how important is having a diverse employee base for General Mills?

General Mills is a national leader in making these opportunities available. The company invests in talent by providing job training and leadership developmental opportunities. We know that creating an inclusive environment is a key way to drive innovation and different thinking, as well as stronger business results.

Today, we have three women on our board and at least half of our U.S. operating divisions are run by women.

My personal experience as a black woman at the company has been extraordinary. I came up through the ranks, starting as a marketing assistant in our cereal division. At every turn, I was provided opportunities to lead large businesses and show that I could drive differential results. It sounds pretty basic, but companies need to be willing to invest in diverse talent and prepare them for critical assignments – and then actually put them in the roles. ●