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Whole foods core values interview

CCMedia Controversial? May be. Opinion? Sometimes. Game Changer? Yes. Opinions are columnist CHIEF EXECUTIVE John Mackey's CEO John Mackey's CEO John Mackey's CEO John Mackey, CEO John Mackey, chief executive John Mackey, said: He has established one of the only Fortune 500 companies that emphasise business consciously. Whole Foods Market has proven to the world that a business does not have to sacrifice its bottom line in the name of ethics, but can in fact prosper as a direct result of its sustainable practices. Maren Keeley: The Core Values at Whole Foods Market (WFM) talks volumes about the company's culture. What's the hardest part of bringing it to fertility? Are some more challenging than others and, if so, why? John Mackey: We started with five core values and added more as we developed and as the company grew in terms of geography, impact and consciousness. We now have eight. They are our constants and they keep us grounded. So, I don't think of it as bringing core values to fertility, but rather using them as our guiding principles and a compass as we grow the business. The challenge is to keep them all balanced in creating win-win situations that ensure all stakeholders are equally happy. It creates a sustainable, conscious business system. Meghan French Dunbar: We would like to know about times that Whole Foods has gone through a strategy pivot. How did you conclude that these pivots were needed? Which of these decisions came from a mission or purpose-driven place as opposed to a lucrative place? JM: There is a chapter in the book about our store in Madison, WI, which talks about how we are short on taking care of our team members and supporting their happiness and excellence in the workplace. Several team members there decided to appeal to a Labour Union for third-party representation. Although a contact was never activated in that store and the Team members who continued to work there eventually voted against union representation, it was a ramp call for us and for me personally. I traveled the country and visited every single one of our stores over the next 12 months, with one-on-one discussions and group meetings with team members to see how we can do a better job of supporting them. We made changes to ensure leadership in Madison and across the company was actively serving the purpose and mission of the organization and that we are running the talk on this front. It had nothing to do with profits, but preserving, spreading and reviving the wonderful culture our team members have created over the years. MK: What were some of the hardest choices you had to make regarding WFM? JM: There were many difficult choices the road. I found that if I truly follow my heart, the business decisions seem to be sound. One very difficult decision was when I had to ask my father to continue the chairman of Council. He was my coach and mentor of the time that I was 25 until I was about 40. Without his guidance, I'm pretty sure I would wreck whole food market in my youth. But there came a point when he wanted me to lead the company differently than I thought we should – conservative and without taking risks — and something had to change. Our disagreements interfered with our personal relationship. It was a very difficult decision, but it was the best thing for me and for the company. It was a big leap forward in my own personal growth. MK: Can you talk to the challenges WFM has experienced in the company's impressive expansion and growth? Did any of these challenges come as a surprise? JM: One of the most crucial moments of the company happened early during the Memorial Day flood of 1981, when Austin experienced the biggest flood in more than 70 years and destroying the city. It left our shop with almost eight feet of standing water and almost wiped us out. That experience pulled our young company together. It demonstrated to us that all our stakeholders have the potential to form close relationships with us, to care and commit intensely. Our team members grew closer together, our commitment to our clients is very deepened, and we have come to understand that we have actually made an important difference in people's lives. If all our stakeholders don't care so much about our company then and come together in support, Whole Foods Market would have closed to exist. It's quite humble to think about it. MFD: In the past five years WFM has developed its Animal Welfare Rating System. Did WFM decide that this was an essential step because there was nothing comparable in existence? What business challenges have come with this significant shift? JM: In 2003, animal rights activists arrived at the Whole Foods Market's annual meeting and chose us and we tried to err to stop selling duck meat from one of our suppliers. I started a dialogue with one of the activists, Lauren Ornelas, after the meeting ended. At the time, I believed Whole Foods Market already had the best animal welfare standards of any food retailer in the US. Lauren told me that while I was meant and idealistic, I was also largely uninformed when it came to animal welfare. I was taken back by some of her harsh criticism, but I accepted her challenge of being better informed about animal welfare. That summer, I read a dozen books about the livestock industry and animal welfare to better educate myself. By the end of the summer I realized she was absolutely right - I was horrified by what I learned. I personally changed my diet because of this experience and had a vegan, but I also wanted to start Whole Foods Market to jointly with these animal welfare activists so that they can help improve our animal welfare standards. I felt the company had an ethical responsibility to do a better job of finding suppliers who had better overturned their animals. This conversation ultimately led us to the multi-interested approach that led to our Global Animal Partnership 5-Step Animal Welfare Program, which is something we are very proud of as a company. IF YOU WANT TO LEARN AND GROW, YOU SHOULD BE WILLING TO MAKE MISTAKES. MK: One of the company's Core values sells the highest quality natural and organic products available. What challenges come with this? JM: Without a doubt, our quality standards are what we put apart in the industry and we have the bar high in all departments. We don't always get credit for the behind-the-scenes work we do on these standards, but our core buyer knows the lengths we go to and really appreciate the effort. They help us to get better every day by demanding more transparency and deeper standards, which helps us to develop constantly and push the industry to prompt positive change. The challenge is maintaining our standards, but continues to experiment and innovate so that we do not become complacent. We are a multi-regional company that empowers our stores and regions to experiment with new ideas and take concepts and risks – good ideas are celebrated and often repeated, but we also missed a lot. If you are not willing to take risks though, you will never be able to grow as a company. ANIMAL WELFARE RATING SYSTEM STEP 5+ ANIMAL CENTERED, WHOLE LIFE ON THE SAME FARM STEP 5 ANIMALS CENTERED, NO PHYSICAL CHANGES STEP 4 GRAZING CENTERED WALK 3 ENHANCED OUTDOOR ACCESS STEP 2 ENRICHED ENVIRONMENT STEP 1 NO CAGES, NO CRATES, NO CROWDING MK: Many of the major grocery store chains now offer natural and organic products in a section of their stores. Has it had an effect on WFM either positive or negative? Has WFM shifted its strategy or operations in any capacity? JM: There was a time when Whole Foods Market was one of a handful of options when it came to the niche sector of natural and organic foods. The explosion of growth in the industry, which is partly evidence of the work that Whole Foods Market has done over the past 36 years, has caused an increase in competition from small natural chains and conventional chains that imitate. We must continue to innovate, experiment, and distinguish ourselves at a faster pace than ever before to continue our buyers an unriveted experience and the best quality products that taste great and distinguish us from our competition. Increased competition forced us to look closer to our price strategy and do a better job of conveying our value offerings – we look at it as good thing, because it forces us to do better. No one in the industry can match the level of quality quality we maintain all departments, so it is about balancing the quality with value to ensure there is something for everyone in our stores. MFD: Do you feel that you have ever had to compromise responsibility on any of your core values because of your fiduciary responsibility to your shareholders? JM: All the decisions we make as a company support the company's mission and higher purpose – we do not make decisions exclusively based on profit. Conscious businesses recognize the interdependence that exist among all stakeholders and appreciate those relationships equally (we call it Win6 in the book). When the relationships are not similarly valued, you run the risk of one of the stakeholders who become tafs dominant and potentially cancer-like, threatening the well-being and balance of the entire system. Every company needs to make money, but if it's your only goal and you fall into the trap of trades at the expense of your other stakeholders, your business will eventually fail. When all stakeholders – customers, suppliers, team members, shareholders, the environment and the community – are considered interdependent and everyone wins, the level of performance is exponentially increased and so is the potential for future success. MK: Since publishing your book, Conscious Capitalism, have you come across other companies that consciously operate that you are not in the book and, if so? JM: Conscious Capitalism is a revolution that has already begun. Since the book launched, Raj [Sisodia] and I have heard of hundreds of smaller, lesser-known companies that embrace the nets of conscious capitalism. Companies such as Oklahoma's First United Bank, Nick's Pizza & Pub in Illinois, and Studio Movie Grill are some examples, but there are much more. The incentive to participate in Conscious Capitalism is not only to do well, but to achieve higher financial performance, a sustainable business, and deeper and more beneficial relationships with stakeholders. MFD: Besides cost and revenue, what are the main statistics to measure for a purpose-driven business? JM: There are four important nets of Conscious Capitalism – interested integration, conscious leadership, higher purpose and core values, and conscious culture and management. They represent the essential elements of an integrated business philosophy that needs to be holistically understood to be effectively manifested. MFD: What have you learned from failure, both professional and personal? JM: If you want to learn and grow, you should be willing to make mistakes. For many people, failure is something that is difficult to recognize and they will defend their decisions at all costs when you are questioned, but if you don't take time to interrupt and reflect on lessons learned, you are bound to repeat your mistakes in the future. Learn from them and move on. It's not easy, but being more aware and living in the moment is something that has helped me tremendously both personally and professionally. One of the biggest lessons I learned was from the SEC [Securities and Exchange Commission] investigation that took place when the FTC [Federal Trade Commission] tried to block our acquisition of Wild Oats in 2007. I explained the situation in detail in the book, but basically after the Commission downloaded all my emails, they learned that I was placed on Yahoo under a screen name! I did this for fun and everyone used screen names on the website, so I certainly didn't think I was doing anything illegal. My reputation was smeared by the media and because I was investigated, I wasn't allowed to defend myself publicly, so I had to listen quietly like distorted attacks from all sides through the media. The SEC ended its investigation that I did nothing illegal and the WFM board concluded the same thing. The experience was painful, but instead of contracting and to defense, I expanded my consciousness and was able to turn a crisis into an opportunity for growth – personally, mentally, and professionally. One of the most important lessons I learned was that I am now a public figure and I need to be more aware of everything I do, say and write. From that point on, I started asking myself the question, How would I feel if what I'm doing now appeared on the cover of the newspaper or ended up on the news? Will I still do it? MK: What advice would you give to someone who starts his or her own company? JM: My biggest piece of advice is to follow your heart. Take time to ask the big questions like, why am I here? What am I caring about? What excites me?, and answers your true calling. Life is short, so don't deceive yourself by doing something you don't love and believe in. MFD: What advice do you have for building a board? JM: Look for people who are invested in the company over the long term and believe in the higher purpose of the company. Those who are just looking for short-term profits and an immediate return on investment is not going to help the company move forward in a way that is mutually beneficial to all stakeholders. I FOUND THAT IF I TRULY FOLLOW MY HEART, THE BUSINESS DECISIONS SOUND. MK: What is your vision for the future for WFM? JM: Our higher goal is constantly developed by tapping into our increased level of consciousness for the good of Whole Foods Market, our stakeholders, and for society as a whole. Currently we focus on consoling to improving the health of Americans by providing education and healthy foods. We are improving agricultural systems to make them more sustainable human, even more efficient. And we help end poverty worldwide through micro-funding to women in developing countries. MFD: Finally, what makes you smile? JM: I'm an avagingly long-distance hiker, so I really enjoy being in nature – it has its own rhythm and pace that helps me re-inchronize. I also feel the most at home with my wife, Deborah, when we spend time out at our place in the Texas Hill Country or traveling together. Currently we are in India, which is a very special place for Deborah. MK: What advice would you give to someone who starts his or her own company? JM: My biggest piece of advice is to follow your heart. Take time to ask the big questions like, why am I here? What am I caring about? What excites me? and answer your true calling. Life is short, so don't cheated on yourself by doing something you don't love and believe in.

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