

**Conscious Capitalism: Liberating the Heroic Spirit of Business by John Mackey and Rajendra Sisodia**



Review by Genie Bolduc

“Business is based on cooperation and voluntary exchange.” I know and love the *Declaration of Interdependence* as a landmark in Whole Foods Market history where our model was first articulated, that successful business is a voluntary relationship built on creating a functional and productive business through balance of stakeholder value. It is a revolutionary vision and clearly works as evidenced by the success of WFM. The stakeholders in WFM are likeminded in that we want to do good over making huge profit, but know that creating a good profit is necessary to support us and make it possible to create sustainable change.

John says that “leadership must integrate their heads with their hearts”. I work at WFM because I believe that we stand for doing the right thing. I, like many other stakeholders of WFM, need to believe that what I am doing is for the greater good. Empowerment to do what I think is right and the freedom to try things, succeed or fail and try again, is the essence to me of progressive business.

John says that desire for short term gain has destroyed companies. WFM shoppers long term allegiance to WFM demonstrates that very point. By doing the right thing and maximizing service and customer satisfaction, we have created devotion to our brand which is invaluable in our success as a company.

“Getting rid of tradeoff thinking” is a business shift, as I have always heard that in order to be successful in business, someone has to suffer in order for you to prosper. Not so says WFM and we have proven success.

“Perform for a purpose like a sports team” really does define the team spirit that drives the success of our teams and through our teams, the success of WFM. Teams excel when armed with a vision and something to fight for, as defined by the coach/leadership. Win one for the gipper! We are fighting for the potential of the goodness of business, not once we succeed, but all along. Progress comes with investment of financial capital and financial capital comes from success in business. Even charity is not possible without funds but the big “change” John is touting in Conscious Capitalism is that you do not have to take advantage of others along the way to create that financial success in order to do good. In fact, by serving all stakeholders fairly, success comes in spades.

WFM’s success stems from that recognition of interdependence and independence. Regions and stores are independent (within the confines of our common core values) to suit the needs of their individual stakeholders; customers, Team Members, vendors, community. However, balancing the needs and value given each of our independent and yet interdependent stakeholders determines our success. What a brilliant formula for individual and collective success. Regions and individual stores within regions are

free to experiment to better serve their specific stakeholders. Then wins in those individual stores, through sharing, evolve up into wins for regions and the whole company.

I truly believe that business is not inherently evil and can serve the greater good. John mentions many such businesses that are built on a different business model than the one we grew up hearing about. When I came to WFM I found that the four of the things that interest me most, doing the right thing, food, helping people and having fun doing it, are revered in WFM. The first thing that made me stay is the atmosphere of trust and love that prevails over the traditional business model of distrust and taking as much advantage as possible. A culture of treating people with dignity and respect, of trust instead of suspicion (100% guarantee even with no receipt) and hiring for attitude and training for skills makes me proud to work with WFM.

I find the images of “the heroic” and John as the dragon slayer, a little too dramatic. “The wealth creators, the entrepreneurs actually travel the heroic path.” There may be a better way to say this like “the wealth creators, the entrepreneurs, can choose to follow a more heroic path, creating positive social change as opposed to following old business paradigms.” But that said, the book is John’s vision and this is his vision.

It would be great for John to write a sequel where many more hands on concrete examples of the exact business practices, not by theory but step by step example, would help readers understand how the theory is translated into actual concrete action.

I love what this book stands for and the cause of encouraging other firms to join WFM on our path of Conscious Capitalism. How wonderful it is to share that the truest and fastest way to make change is to gain financial success, not by taking advantage of other people but by doing the right thing.