

Purpose-Driven at Every Level

An Interview with Robert Forrester,
President and Chief Executive Officer, Newman's Own Foundation and Executive Chairman, Newman's Own, Inc.

EDITORS' NOTE *Bob Forrester's 40-plus year career has been devoted to philanthropy and support of the global nongovernmental/nonprofit sector. A close friend of Paul Newman, he was asked by Paul to become the first president of Newman's Own Foundation when it was created in 2005.*



Robert Forrester

ORGANIZATION BRIEF *Newman's Own, Inc. (newmansown.com) was started in 1982 by Paul Newman with a single salad dressing and a unique concept: quality trumps profits and all profits go to charity. The mission never changed from its first days, and there are now over 300 products. Newman established Newman's Own Foundation (newmansownfoundation.org) in 2005 to ensure that his legacy continued and he was at the helm of the first meeting in November of that year. Newman passed away in 2008, and his mission continues to live on. Today, the foundation focuses on encouraging philanthropy, children with life-limiting conditions, empowerment, and nutrition. To date, nearly \$460 million has gone to charitable organizations – all from the profits and royalties generated from Newman's Own products. \$280 million of that was donated in the past 10 years alone.*

Would you talk about the mission of the foundation when it was founded and has Newman's Own Foundation remained true to it?

I hope so. I think about it every day. The mission is simple but also complex.

Until 2005, when we started the foundation and when Paul (Newman) asked me to be President, all the giving from Newman's Own was done personally by Paul. His way of doing things was very non-prescriptive. He believed that philanthropy should come from people who had been fortunate in their lives and therefore had the opportunity to share their good luck and give back, because it was the right thing to do.

The complexity of it at times is that Paul never said we should do things a certain way so we constantly need to reaffirm his core values and adapt them to contemporary times.

We're very fortunate that when we started the foundation, Paul was not only very much alive but very robust and engaged. He was involved in the innovation of all the foods, and he was the chairman of the foundation. The broad programs we laid out during the four years he was involved gave our simple principles a guiding framework.

Since Newman's Own is a private company, we can make quick decisions and take some calculated risk in what we do. This is how Paul

thought about things – he was a great entrepreneur; while public companies are accountable to shareholders, we think of our grantees as our shareholders.

Is it more about homing in on a few specific areas where you can make the most impact or more about trying to have a broader influence across all areas of need?

We preach that we always want to put a face on what we're doing. We're not a big foundation; our annual giving is around \$30 million, all of it derived from the profits and royalties of Newman's Own food and beverages. We're not a foundation with the assets to do anything at enormous scale, so we seek organizations that fit within a certain worldview. Our priorities include encouraging philanthropic behavior; children with life-limiting conditions; empowerment; and nutrition, and we make general grants outside of that.

We will identify a grantee for a strategic partnership and those partnerships can last for several years. We want to be sure that even if some of the larger concepts we have in mind don't come to fruition, what we have done has made an impact on the direct beneficiaries.

We also will bring into place other assets we have beyond our financial assets, like our brand, which has significant leveraging power in the philanthropic community.

In addition, we're helping grantees build their business capacity. We're not interested in telling them how to run their programs because we think they're smarter than we are about that, but we do have experience with building an organization.

Does the foundation's culture alone bring people in and has that helped with employee engagement?

Our food company, which is owned by the foundation, competes against the big food companies and we can't pay our employees the same. But if someone comes to Newman's Own, that person will never find a more enthusiastic, committed, or hard-working group of people who are happy because of the mission here. People here are purpose-driven at every level. I only have to worry that we don't let a typical corporate structure insert itself into this wonderful environment, which Paul referred to as "creative chaos."

How do you regard driving change? Does it stem from public/private partnership?

No single sector in society can be expected to drive healthy, sustainable social change. We are lucky that in America, unlike many other countries, we have a large and highly respected nonprofit sector. While this sector may not be able to scale as large as government, it is the innovator and risk taker of our society. And, when there are significant needs, the private and public sectors often come together to address those needs.

How do you define philanthropy within the scope of the foundation?

Unfortunately, if people get their information through the media, they think philanthropy is all about money – and the bigger the amount, the bigger the philanthropy. For us, philanthropy is simply about people giving back to help make our world a better place. It can be through financial donations, volunteerism, or just neighbors helping neighbors. If you make it more complicated than that, you will likely be missing the beauty and power of it all.

How important is it in this work to try to appreciate the wins along the way?

We really embrace our grantees as people – those who work hard to make a difference, and those who benefit from the programs and services. The food business is a tough one, so we draw our energy from those small wins, which collectively have significant impact.

We celebrate the good things that are going on and that gives us the energy to take a deep breath and realize we're only halfway up the hill and have to keep trekking. My hope is that someday many of the problems we face in this world are taken care of, but if that doesn't happen, we will still keep trying. ●