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Brad Troemel: *FREEDOM LIGHTS OUR WORLD (FLOW)*

John Mackey (businessman)

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This article is about the businessman. For American football player, see [John Mackey \(American football\)](#).

John Mackey (born August 15, 1953) is an [American businessman](#). He is the current co-CEO of [Whole Foods Market](#), which he co-founded in 1980. Named the [Ernst & Young Entrepreneur of the Year](#) in 2003, Mackey is a strong supporter of [free market](#) economics. He is one of the most influential advocates in the [movement](#) for [organic food](#).^[2]

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Early life and education^[edit]

Mackey was born on August 15, 1953 in [Houston, Texas](#) to Bill and Margaret Mackey. He has a sister and a brother.

Mackey was a student of [philosophy](#) and [religion](#) at the [University of Texas at Austin](#) and [Trinity University](#) in the 1970s, and worked at a [vegetarian co-op](#).^[3] Mackey, who was a [vegetarian](#) for 30 years, now identifies as a [vegan](#).^[4]

John Mackey



Born	John Mackey, May 2009 August 15, 1953 (age 60) Houston, Texas, U.S.
Residence	Austin, Texas, U.S.
Alma mater	University of Texas at Austin
Occupation	CEO of Whole Foods Market
Salary	US\$1[1]
Net worth	US\$ 100 million
Spouse(s)	Deborah
Parents	Bill and Margaret Mackey

Career^[edit]

Mackey co-founded his first [health food store](#), SaferWay, with his girlfriend Renee Lawson (Hardy) in Austin in 1978. They met while living in a vegetarian housing co-op.^[3] They dropped out of college.

They borrowed \$10,000 and raised \$35,000 more to start a vegetarian grocery store which they named SaferWay. At the time, Austin had several small health food stores. The two ran the market on the first floor, a health food restaurant on the second, and, for a short time, lived in the third story of their building. In two years, they merged SaferWay with Clarksville Natural Grocery run by Mark Skiles and Craig Weller and renamed the business Whole Foods Market. All four (Mackey, Hardy-Lawson, Skiles and Weller) are considered co-founders of the business.^[3]

Mackey built Whole Foods into an international organization, with outlets in major markets across the country, as well as [Canada](#) and the [United Kingdom](#). Along the way he bought out smaller competitors. In 2007 Whole Foods purchased a major natural foods supermarket competitor, Wild Oats Markets, Inc.

Animal welfare^[edit]

Whole Foods was the first grocery chain to set standards for humane animal treatment.^[2] Mackey was influenced by animal rights activist, Lauren Ornelas, who criticized Whole Foods' animal standards regarding ducks at a shareholder meeting in 2003. Mackey gave Ornelas his email address and they corresponded on the issue. He studied issues related to factory farming and decided to switch to a primarily vegan diet that included only eggs from his own chickens. Since 2006, he has followed an entirely plant-based diet. He advocates tougher animal standards.^[5]

Despite Whole Foods' welfare standards, Mackey has been criticized by [abolitionist](#) vegans such as [Gary L. Francione](#), who believes the Whole Foods company policies betray the [animal rights](#) position.^[6] By other accounts, Mackey is the "driving force" behind significant changes in animal welfare. For instance, he started a [non-profit](#) foundation, the Animal Compassion Foundation, to address making animal welfare more economically viable.^[7] The Animal Compassion Foundation folded in 2008 with the formation of the Global Animal Partnership, a non-profit organization that is independent of Whole Foods Market. Mackey is on the Board of Directors of Global Animal Partnership.^[8] He has been a member of the Board of Directors of the Humane Society of the United States since 2009.^[9]

Letter to employees^[edit]

In 2006, Mackey announced he was reducing his [salary to \\$1 a year](#), would donate his stock portfolio to charity, and set up a \$100,000 emergency fund for staff facing personal problems.^[10] He wrote: "I am now 53 years old and I have reached a place in my life where I no longer want to work for money, but simply for the joy of the work itself and to better answer the call to service that I feel so clearly in my own heart."^[11]

He has instituted caps on executive pay at the company.^[1]

Political views^[edit]

Libertarianism^[edit]

In a debate in *Reason* magazine among Mackey, economist [Milton Friedman](#), and entrepreneur [T. J. Rodgers](#), Mackey said that he is a [free market libertarian](#).^[12] He said that he used to be a [democratic socialist](#) in college. As a beginning businessman he was challenged by workers for not paying adequate wages and by customers for overcharging, during a time when he was hardly breaking even. He began to take a more capitalistic worldview, and discovered the works of [Ludwig von Mises](#), [Friedrich Hayek](#) and [Milton Friedman](#).^[13] Mackey is an admirer of some of author [Ayn Rand](#)'s novels.^[14]

Mackey co-founded the organization, Freedom Lights Our World ([FLOW](#)), to combine his commitments to "economic and political freedom as well as personal growth, social responsibility, and environmental stewardship."^[15] He supports such changes as [green tax shifts](#), environmental trusts, world legal systems to allow the poor to create legal businesses, and a [citizen's dividend](#) to help the poor in the developed world.^[16] The name and focus of FLOW have since become Conscious Capitalism, Inc., which was initially created as a program of FLOW and evolved to the point at which it became the organization's principal focus. In 2010 the name of the organization was formally changed. The Conscious Capitalism Institute was

chartered in 2009. In 2010 the original FLOW group merged with the Institute group to become one unified organization.[17] In 2013 Mackey was interviewed in [Harvard Business Review's](#) Ideacast podcast about his views on [Conscious Capitalism](#).[18] Mackey said, "If you want to be competitive in the long term, your business needs to have discovered its higher purpose and it needs to adopt a stakeholder philosophy." He eschewed the conventional thinking that "business has to be sort of ruthless and heartless to be successful".[19]

Healthcare reform[edit]

Mackey opposed the [public health insurance option](#) that ultimately did not become part of the [Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act](#). Mackey thinks a better plan would be allowing consumers to purchase health insurance across state lines and use a combination of [health savings accounts](#) and catastrophic insurance, as Whole Foods does.[20] Mackey's statement that Americans do not have an intrinsic right to healthcare led to calls for a [boycott](#) of Whole Foods Market from the [Progressive Review](#) and from numerous groups on [Facebook](#).[21] Alternatively, [Tea Party movement](#) advocates organized a number of [buycotts](#) in support of Mackey's suggestions [22]

In an [NPR](#) interview in 2013, Mackey compared the [Obama administration's healthcare law](#) to 'fascism' instead of [socialism](#), stating, "[t]echnically speaking, it's more like fascism. Socialism is where the government owns the means of production. In fascism, the government doesn't own the means of production, but they do control it — and that's what's happening with our health care programs and these reforms." [23][24] The day following the interview, Mackey wrote in a [blog post](#) that he regretted having made the remark, stating that he "made a poor word choice to describe [the U.S.] healthcare system." [24][25] Instead, he called it 'government-controlled health care.' [24]

Unions[edit]

Mackey is known for his strong anti-union views, having once compared unions to herpes in that "it won't kill you, but it's very unpleasant and will make a lot of people not want to be your lover." [4] Whole Foods Market, along with [Costco](#) and [Starbucks](#), teamed up in 2008 to create an alternative to the [Employee Free Choice Act](#). The three companies invited other corporations, unions and public interest groups to join them, proposing instead that unions be given more access to meet with workers, stricter penalties for labor violations and a guaranteed right to request secret ballots in all circumstances.[26]

Mackey commented in 2005:

"It's illegal in the United States for there to be [company unions](#) — special unions which are formed and controlled by the employees and managers of the company to represent their interests and collectively bargain on their behalf. These type of unions are legal in many countries such as Japan, but are illegal in the United States. Instead the law requires that all unions be outside unions. I believe this law should be repealed and that company unions should be as legal as any other kind of voluntary association." [27]

Environment[edit]

Mackey does not identify as a skeptic of [scientific opinion on climate change](#); rather, he believes that "climate change is perfectly natural and not necessarily bad." [28]

In a 2010 discussion of books on his reading stack with journalist Nick Paumgarten, Mackey explained his views on human-caused climate change were similar to those of author [Ian Plimer](#):

...Mackey told me that he agrees with the book [[Heaven and Earth](#)]'s assertion that, as he put it, "no scientific consensus exists" regarding the causes of [climate change](#); he added, with a candor you could call bold or reckless, that it would be a pity to allow "hysteria about [global warming](#)" to cause us "to raise taxes and increase regulation, and in turn lower our standard of living and lead to an increase in poverty." [29]

Yahoo! Finance postings[edit]

On July 20, 2007, [The Wall Street Journal](#)[30] revealed that Mackey was, for at least seven years, using the [pseudonym](#) "Rahodeb" (an [anagram](#) of his wife's name, Deborah) to post to [Yahoo Finance](#) forums. He referred to himself in the third person and criticized rival supermarket chain [Wild Oats Markets](#).[31] The [Federal Trade Commission](#)[32] approved a complaint challenging Whole Foods Market's approximately \$670 million acquisition of its chief rival, Wild Oats Markets, Inc. It authorized the FTC staff to seek a

temporary restraining order and preliminary injunction in federal district court to halt the deal, pending an administrative trial on the merits. After an extensive regulatory battle with the FTC, a federal appeals court consented to the deal. Whole Foods officially completed their buyout of Wild Oats on August 27, 2007.

In May 2008, after an SEC investigation cleared him, Mackey started [blogging](#) again. In a 2,037 word post, he wrote about why he began blogging in the first place and how his upbringing drove him to defend himself and Whole Foods. He admitted he made a mistake in judgment, but not in ethics.^[33]

Resignation as Whole Foods Market Chairman^[edit]

On December 24, 2009, Mackey resigned from the position of Chairman of the Board of Whole Foods Market, a position he held since 1978. On his blog he said, "John Elstrott will now take the title of Chairman of the Board, which will accurately reflect the authority and the responsibilities that he has had for many years." Mackey remains a member of the Board of Directors.^[34]

Personal life^[edit]

Mackey had a longtime relationship with Mary Kay Hagen.^[3]

He married his current wife, Deborah Morin, in 1991.^[35] They have no children. Both practice [yoga](#). They spend the week in [Austin](#) and weekends at their 720-acre (291.4 ha) ranch 40 miles (64 km) west of Austin.^[3]

Legacy and honors^[edit]

- 2003, Ernst and Young Entrepreneur of the Year
- May 2008, he received an [honorary bachelor's degree](#) from [Bentley College](#).^[5]

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See also^[edit]

- [Sustainable business](#)

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External links^[edit]

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- [FLOW](#) A non-profit co-founded by John Mackey that is dedicated to "liberating the entrepreneurial spirit for good" and described as "a transpartisan movement combing idealistic initiative with free enterprise principles to systematically work toward a better world."
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