

Walmart CEO's Servant Leadership Starts to Give Teeth to the Statement on the Purpose of a Corporation

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In response to the El Paso mass shooting (and too many others), Doug McMillon, Walmart's CEO, announced that their stores would stop selling ammunition used for handguns and military-style weapons, as well as stop selling handguns completely and "discourage" people from carrying weapons in their stores, whether or not the state allowed "open carry." McMillon also called for a debate about reinstating the assault-weapons ban and suggested research on sources and solutions to gun violence.

To be sure, McMillon could have gone further, but his new policies enable Walmart to be a leader in developing more responsible processes around gun control, which is arguably his most effective personal tool to prevent gun violence. McMillon's actions are an example of the power of servant leadership to change the world.



We are in urgent need of more servant-leaders. Leaders who "serve the well-being of people and the communities to which they belong." Leaders, whose first impulse is to serve our collective good, will ensure our future. Corporations who

have long pursued profits as best practice are waking up to their responsibilities to stakeholders other than their own bank accounts and those of their shareholders. Look at The Business Roundtable's recently released Statement on the Purpose of a Corporation. The list of signatories is a Who's Who of the most influential corporate leadership of our time. Though the Statement lacks the necessary specifics to give it the teeth it needs to take a real bite at change, the ideals it promotes lays a cornerstone.

The next important cornerstone is corporate leaders who base decisions on values, not just financial value.

Values are what we care about when no one is looking. Values are not comparative. Excellence, for example, is a value. Being better than other people is not. Kindness is a value, but only if we are not performing it for the profits, accolades or other rewards. What we value, we must necessarily grant as values that others may hold too. If, for example, we value recognition, then we must recognize others. If we value clean drinking water, then we cannot act in ways that deprive others of clean drinking water. If we value our lives and our children's lives, then we cannot act in ways that promote violence against others.

A leader's values are signposts, giving them both strategic and tactical direction. A leader's personal values are *who* they are, when they are being authentic. And a leader's personal values are the single most powerful stance from which to make change. When our actions are founded in the values we prize, we take responsibility for our actions because we serve a greater purpose than our own advancement. Values are not about gaining market share, but about offering the market what it needs with humanity and humility, being a good corporate citizen at the local and global levels. Rather than claim omnipotence, such leaders admit their fallibility in search of the best solution. The humility required to take responsibility isn't always comfortable, but it is powerful.

Vulnerability strengthens a leader's resolve. People sense this commitment and intention. This is how a leader builds long lasting trust. As a result, the whole organization is better aligned. Everyone is pulling in the same direction.

The potential for change signaled by the Statement will have real impact when corporations commit resources, when leaders back their words with values in action. Here are just a few examples of what a company led by a vision of serving all its stakeholders might undertake to provide:

1. a livable minimum wage, funded by fair ratios between highest and lowest compensation within an enterprise;
2. employee health care;
3. environmental leadership, such as—using a meaningful percentage of recycled materials in packaging, green construction of facilities and green energy sources; and
4. solutions to the gun violence epidemic, such as—stopping sales of ammunition and guns and creating better controls.

Doug McMillon's new initiatives at Walmart breathe fresh life into the seasoned ideals of servant leadership. The Statement on the Purpose of a Corporation will only have real clout, if more leaders make values-based decisions. As Robert Greenleaf (who coined the term servant-leader) writes, "If a better society is to be built, one that is more just and more loving, one that provides greater creative opportunity for its people, then the most open course is to raise both the capacity to serve and the very performance as servant of existing major institutions by new regenerative forces operating within them."

Dare to serve.



About the Author: Mina Samuels is a writer, playwright and performer, and in a previous incarnation, a litigation lawyer and human rights advocate. Her books include, *Run Like A Girl 365 Days: A Practical, Personal, Inspirational Guide for Women Athletes* (Skyhorse Press; June 2019), *Run Like a Girl: How Strong Women Make Happy Lives* (for which she appeared on *The Today Show*); a novel, *The Queen of Cups*; and *The Think Big Manifesto*, co-authored with Michael Port. She created and performed two award-winning solo shows, and her ensemble play, *Because I Am Your Queen*, which had its first production at University of Illinois' Krannert Center for the Performing Arts in March 2019. She also posts a weekly translation of one of Jean de La Fontaine's 17th century French fables with contemporary commentary. When she's not writing, she might be out on the roads or trails, running, mountain biking, cross-country skiing, doing aerial yoga, or any number of other activities that make her heart beat faster. For more about Mina, visit her website at: www.minasamuels.com.