

A Whole Foods Customer Told the Company's Founder: 'You're Just Not a Good CEO' – Here Was His Response

John Mackey is cofounder and the longtime CEO of Whole Foods. But in the early days of his business, he was called something else. And it wasn't meant as a compliment: Wacky Mackey.

One of his cofounders came up with the name, as a way of mocking Mackey's lifestyle. To his doubters, Mackey seemed like an unserious leader for an increasingly serious business. He started the company when he was 24, having never attended a business class. He meditated, took psychedelics, and had many spiritual pursuits. He looked like a long-haired hippie. And while Mackey liked who he was, the skeptics ate at him. He wondered if he could grow into a fully respected leader, while still being himself.

Ultimately, of course, he prevailed – building and running Whole Foods for 44 years, until his retirement in 2022. His rude cofounder had left the business decades earlier. Mackey chronicles all this and more in his new book, *The Whole Story*. "I wanted to convey to other entrepreneurs that this is a journey," he says. "You have to grow, both personally and as a leader, as fast as the business. If you don't, they'll throw you out." Here, he explains how to become the leader your company needs – without compromising your values.

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