

Biography of MR. JOHN WOOD



MR. JOHN WOOD

john@roomtoread.org

SNAPSHOT

- ◆ Founder of Room to Read, an award-winning international education non-profit organization that has raised over US\$450 million and serves over 12 million children in 15 countries.
- ◆ Winner of the initial Microsoft Alumni of the Year award, presented by Bill and Melinda Gates.
- ◆ Selected as a Young Global Leader by the World Economic Forum.
- ◆ Featured on Bloomberg Television, CNBC's Squawk Box, Fast Company, Forbes, Fox News, MSNBC, New York Times Magazine, Financial Times and the Wall Street Journal.
- ◆ Four-time speaker at the Clinton Global Initiative.
- ◆ Named by Goldman Sachs as one of the World's 100 Most Intriguing Entrepreneurs.
- ◆ Author of *Leaving Microsoft to Change the World*, which was named by Amazon as "Ten Best Business Narratives of the Year"; described by Publisher Weekly as "an infectiously inspiring read"; translated into 23 languages; featured in The Orphan Winfrey Show.



Preface to MR. JOHN WOOD's new book

“PURPOSE, INCORPORATED: TURNING CAUSE INTO YOUR COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE”

Early in my career, I was a senior Microsoft executive who spent most of his time thinking about the company's hard-nosed business goals: how to launch new products, outflank competitors to capture market share, and open new subsidiaries. Truth be told, I was also paying a lot of attention to feathering my nest with as many stock options as possible.

In 1998, to celebrate my 7-year anniversary with the company, I set out on a bold adventure – an 18-day, 200 mile trek in Nepal's Annapurna mountain range. At the end of an arduous first day, I sat down in a teahouse and soon met the headmaster of the local school in Bahundanda. He offered to give me a quick tour of the dilapidated school, ending in a library that was completely devoid of children's books. Pointing to the empty shelves, he explained: “In Nepal, we are too poor to afford education. But until we have education, we will always remain poor.”... “Perhaps, sir, you will someday come back with books.”

Fast forward 19 years to 2017 and our Room to Read teams have sponsored the construction of 2,500 school buildings, funded long-term scholarships for over 50,000 young women, and trained over 15,000 teachers in literacy and library instruction. That first little library in Bahundanda has multiplied beyond my wildest dreams – today over 20,000 communities in 15 countries have Room to Read libraries. Over 12,000,000 students have access to enhanced education opportunities, and that number will grow to over 15 million by 2020.



Where Cause Meets Capitalism

As we continued to grow, we met more and more business leaders who expressed a desire to work with us. Many had originally come on board as individual donors after attending events like our annual galas in dozens of cities, only later to ask “How can I get my company involved?” Through hours of conversations with hundreds of businesses, we learned that many were in the midst of a transition. Whereas they'd once had a silo-ed Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) department, they were now trying to infuse wide swathes of their company with the mantra of purpose in order to make it a team sport. Many were rejecting the age-old notion that purpose was antithetical to profits, and instead were finding ways that it could help with business goals, including building bonds with customers, generating positive buzz on social media, recruiting millennials, increasing motivation and lowering attrition rates for their best employees.

We talked to a wide range of companies – from unknown startups in fields as varied as skin care and bottled water to pre-IPO tech companies to household names like Google and Starbucks. While in many ways different, each shared a common trait: they had found ways to stand for something bigger than just themselves. Yes, they cared about sales and net income and market share, because if they didn't get those right, then they wouldn't be in business. But the key is that these weren't the only things they cared about. They dared to talk about having a bigger mission, one that focused on social change, fixing long-standing problems, providing uplift for the world's poorest people.

It wasn't happening with only us. As I talked to other social sector leaders, they were reporting something similar -- that the most visionary companies and leaders were partnering with them, and using purpose as a unique competitive advantage. These business leaders saw purpose not as a one-way ticket to the poor house, but instead as a key competitive advantage that could actually enhance enterprise value.

It is to help explain, celebrate and accelerate this shift that I decided to write this book. To be clear, I'm challenging both myself as author, and you as the reader, to remain in hard-core capitalist mode, rather than focusing on the obvious feel good factor. I will provide examples of so many companies that are using purpose both as a competitive advantage, and as a way to improve the world. I hope this book can be a clarion call to encourage people at all levels of their companies to create their own unique marriage between cause and capitalism. As I've interviewed experienced CEOs and young interns, enthusiastic customers and wary investors, I've learned that the corporate world is not what it once was. There's a new land of opportunity, and – luckily for all – its streets are paved with Purpose.