

Peet's 'Pursuit of Better': Scaling With Soul

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“What I’m really proud [of] is how we scale with soul,” says Shawn Conway, CEO of Peet’s Coffee, in a very animated interview following our honoring him in our August feature, [“Social Capital: Changing The World By Changing How The World Does Business.”](#)

At its core, [Shawn](#) says, “For us, we believe that having a good business and a thriving business allows us to have a great and positive impact on people in some really meaningful ways.”

The breadth of what he’s talking about really took our breath away. It goes so far beyond that hot cup of coffee to start your day in the morning or a cold

one to refresh in the afternoon. After all, he explains, “In one sense, we’re a coffee company. We’re also a people company. And the humanity of this business is one of those things that, once you understand it through that lens, a lot of the things we do seem to make a lot more sense to people.”

One of those things has to do with the certification of Peet’s coffee. “We’re not big on buying certifications,” he says. Instead, Peet’s has its own program – an innovative one Peet’s developed with Enveritas, an organization aiming for “carbon neutral coffee” through its efforts working, as its website explains, “with partners in Southeast Asia to understand the impact of planting mangroves that are linked directly to the carbon dioxide footprint of our roaster’s customers.” Relying on actual visits to each farm that Peet’s sources from, Shawn says, “We want to understand the conditions and ... when we find conditions there that need improvement, we help.” The point Shawn makes very clear throughout the interview is, “It’s not excluding people; it’s lifting people up, helping them to a better life.”

Working with small farms in relationships that go back three or four generations, Shawn emphasizes, “We have impact programs in those areas so the things that are unique to those areas – it could be help with water treatment, it could be really anything – we have a very strict set of standards. But our goal is continuous improvement.” And then there’s the women’s entrepreneur center Peet’s funds in Colombia to make sure that women farmers have the opportunity to learn the business skills so they can run better businesses.

And there are other programs that go to the heart of the industry itself to help make sure there’s a long-term sustainable future for it; Peet’s is the angel investor behind the UC Davis Coffee Center, which is focused on learning about quality and learning about coffee post-harvest.

It's obvious he enjoys talking about all this. But he was especially eager to talk about the company's Covid response – and how it kept its 5,000 people at work delivering Peet's coffee to its customers and serving its customers, about which he says, “It gives me goosebumps talking about it still.”

With or without a cup of coffee in hand, watch the video below and settle in for an eye-opening excursion into the company that lives by “pursuit of better.”

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