



## Expert Commentary

### Whole Foods CEO John Mackey's Association with Alleged Sex Abuser Marc Gafni

**[Edward L. Queen](#), Director, Ethics and Servant Leadership Program, Center for Ethics, Emory University:**

"The CEO of Whole Foods has managed this horribly. While his latest statement is an improvement in that he finally acknowledges the pain and suffering caused by sexual abuse, he continues to fail to demonstrate the deep thoughtfulness of response these allegations warrant."

**[James Abruzzo](#), Co-director, Institute for Ethical Leadership, Rutgers Business School:**

"Sometimes the appearance of impropriety is itself improper. As a person whose name, ideals and personal mission contribute to the brand value of a public company, Mackey's responsibility to Whole Foods' shareholders should outweigh any personal predilections."

**[Sandra J. Sucher](#), Professor of Management Practice, Joseph L. Rice, III Faculty Fellow, Harvard Business School, and author, *The Moral Leader: Challenges, Tools, and Insights*:**

"Mackey's fellow board members of Conscious Capitalism have legal duties of care and loyalty to the nonprofit. They need to ask how Mackey's association with Gafni may affect the reputation of the organization."

**[Brad Hecht](#), Vice President and Chief Research Officer, Reputation Institute:**

"As the founder of, primary spokesman for, and emotional leader of Whole Foods Market, John Mackey has a responsibility to immediately and directly address this issue. Whether he is willing to admit it or not, Mackey's personal actions and associations will have a direct impact on the reputation of Whole Foods Market, and therefore the willingness of customers to support the company he leads."

**[Melissa Agnes](#), President and co-Founder of Agnes + Day, and Member of the Board of Directors, Online Reputation and Brand Protection Coalition:**

“And while there is such thing as having personal relationships that do not overlap or reflect on the organization for which you work, there are two factors that play into this not being the case for Whole Foods in this particular situation: 1. Mackey is a co-founder of Whole Foods, not just an employee. Therefore, his personal moral and ethical choices are, at least in part, a reflection on his organization; and 2. When you openly choose to have a relationship with an alleged sex offender who has willingly admitted to having had sexual relations with a young girl, your character *will* be judged. And like it or not, as co-CEO, that judgment inevitably reflects upon the organization you represent.”

**[Doug White](#), former director, Graduate Program in Fundraising Management, Columbia University, and author, *The Nonprofit Challenge: Integrating Ethics into the Purpose and Promise of Our Nation’s Charities*:**

“There are three basic categories to consider: 1. those actions governed by law, 2. decisions that have no impact — like where you’ll eat dinner tonight, and 3. what we’re talking about in this case — things people care about, but where the law doesn’t go. Gafni’s uncontested, public admission of having sexual contact with a 14-year-old girl is relevant. By definition, as a minor, she could not grant consent. By ignoring this relevant information, Mackey and Conscious Capitalism are violating one of the basic mores of ethical decision-making.”

**[John Paul Rollert](#), Adjunct Assistant Professor of Behavioral Science at the University of Chicago Booth School of Business, and writer of the “In-House Ethicist” for the *Chicago Booth Review*:**

“As a moral matter, I find it notable that, as I understand it from our discussion, Conscious Capitalism doesn’t want to have a larger conversation about this situation. If we look at the Sandusky problem at Penn State, or abusive priests in the Catholic Church, or the current Bill Cosby situation, we sometimes ask, ‘How could this have happened?’ One answer may be that people who are in power inadvertently create a culture of silence around them, with others not wanting to speak up or even address a situation for fear of harming their own interests. Who knows if that is the case here, but the unwillingness to have a frank conversation can protect and embolden an abuser and, in some cases, allow for problems of abuse to flourish for decades.”

**[Myka N. Held, Esq.](#), Staff Attorney, Legal Assistance Foundation, Former Staff Attorney, SurvJustice:**

“Given the dismal rates of prosecution of rapists, and the fact that even rapists who are prosecuted are not always convicted or appropriately punished, we cannot use the wide-spread failure of the criminal justice system as an excuse to let offenders off the hook. For these reasons alone it is important for us as a society to hold Gafni accountable, and part of the mechanisms for doing so require us to demand that his powerful friends end their support.”

**[Matthew Sandusky](#), Founder and Executive Director, Peaceful Hearts Foundation (adopted/abused son of former Penn State football coach, convicted pedophile Jerry Sandusky):**

“John Mackey and the Whole Foods Market Board of Directors have an opportunity to reach millions with an important message. Instead of maintaining the societal norm of silence around these issues, I would like to see them take a stand against child sexual abuse publicly — take a leadership role in getting the message across that we can no longer remain silent.”

**[David Clohessy](#), Executive Director, SNAP (Survivors Network of Those Abused by Priests, the organization featured in the movie [Spotlight](#)):**

“Mackey’s declaration of loyalty to a credibly accused child molester amounts to dangerous disloyalty to kids and survivors. We all like to stand by our friends. But at a certain point, when kids’ safety and survivors’ healing is at stake, responsible adults put the vulnerability of youngsters and survivors ahead of personal preferences.”

**[Bill Murray](#), Founder and CEO, NAASCA (National Association of Adult Survivors of Child Abuse):**

“John Mackey continues to besmirch the reputation of Whole Foods by participating in ‘institutional enabling.’ He is the voice and face of Whole Foods, and he risks the investments his stockholders and customers have made in the fabulously successful company.”

**[Nikki DuBose](#), Board of Directors, Peaceful Hearts Foundation:**

“Regardless of whether Gafni was ever charged with a crime, and in spite of statutes of limitations restrictions\*, we are obligated as a society to support victims and survivors of child sexual abuse and give them a voice. As a leader, Whole Foods CEO Mackey’s unwillingness to address the issues at hand enables perpetrators of sexual assault, and allows the cultural stigma to continue.” [\*See also: [Statutes of limitation](#), [The New York State Senate](#)]