

Improving Children's Lives

An Interview with Alex Amouyel, President and Chief Executive Officer, Newman's Own Foundation

EDITORS' NOTE Alex Amouyel is the President and CEO of Newman's Own Foundation, a private grant-making foundation whose mission is to nourish and transform the lives of children who face adversity. She leads the Foundation's efforts to utilize 100 percent of the profits from all Newman's Own products in service of this mission. Prior to this, Amouyel led MIT Solve as its Founding Executive Director with a mission to drive innovation to solve world challenges. She



Alex Amouyel

steered MIT Solve's growth to support over 268 Solver teams and Indigenous Communities Fellows, catalyzed over \$60 million in commitments, and brokered more than 600 transformational partnerships. She also navigated the organization's response to the global pandemic, launched a Health Security & Pandemics Challenge, and expanded Solve's work on racial equity in the United States, including launching Solve's Indigenous Communities Fellowship and the Black & Brown Innovators Program. Prior to these roles, Amouyel was the Director of Program for the Clinton Global Initiative and also worked for Save the Children International and the Boston Consulting Group. Amouyel is a sought-after speaker and thought leader in philanthropy, impact investing, and social entrepreneurship. She earned a dual master's degree in International Affairs from Sciences Po, Paris, and the London School of Economics, along with a bachelor's degree in Biochemistry and Natural Sciences from Trinity College, Cambridge, U.K. Amouyel is the author of *The Answer Is You: A Guidebook to Creating a Life Full of Impact*.

FOUNDATION BRIEF The Newman's Own brand (newmansown.com) was established by Paul Newman in 1982 with a single salad dressing. Today it offers great tasting, high quality food and beverage products for people and pets. These products include salad dressings, pasta sauces, frozen pizza, salsa, refrigerated drinks, and cookies, as well as dog food and pet treats. Newman's Own Foundation (newmansown.org) continues Paul Newman's commitment to donate all royalties and profits that it receives from the sale of Newman's Own food products. Over \$600 million has been donated to good causes since 1982.

Will you discuss the history of Newman's Own Foundation and how you define the Foundation's mission?

Newman's Own Foundation's mission is to nourish and transform the lives of children who face adversity.

Paul Newman, actor, racecar driver, and philanthropist, started selling salad dressing in 1982 with his friend, the writer A. E. Hotchner. They were surprised when they made a profit in their first year, which prompted Paul to decree: "Let's Give It

All Away." And thus, every year they would give away any of the profits they had made from the sale of Newman's Own products to great nonprofit organizations.

When Paul Newman passed away in 2008, he gifted the food company and his name and likeness to the Foundation, so today, we're not a corporate foundation in the traditional sense, we are a foundation that owns a food company, and 100 percent of the profits and royalties from the sale of Newman's Own products go to the Foundation in service of our mission.

What excited you about the opportunity to lead Newman's Own Foundation and made you feel it was the right fit?

Before I ever knew there was a job available, I wrote about Newman's Own Foundation's incredible philanthropic and business model in my book, *The Answer is You: A Guidebook to Creating a Life Full of Impact*. In general, I am dubious about cause marketing or the idea that buying more stuff, e.g., a t-shirt or a pair of shoes, is how you can help do good for people and the world. I contrasted that with Newman's Own Foundation, given it's not 1 percent or 10 percent profits, or a buy-one-give-one model, but 100 percent profits to the Foundation, which is pretty unique.

That model was incredibly innovative 40 years ago, and it's still incredibly innovative today – whether you look at it from the corporate innovation/business model lens or the philanthropic/social impact lens. We're not reliant on an endowment, a rich donor, or the constant stress of fundraising. The Foundation owns a company that sells good food, and any profits and royalties come back to us – our donors in that sense are the consumers – they are the philanthropists.



Paul Newman at The Hole in the Wall Gang Camp in 1990



Harlem Grown brings farm-based education to an urban setting

What made Newman's Own Foundation the right fit for me was the overlap of two key things. First, the mission and innovative approach aligned really well with my life's mission and my values, i.e., what I want to contribute to the world, which is all about equality of opportunity. Second, I thought it aligned really well with my unique set of superpowers, i.e., what I could uniquely contribute would be needed, appreciated, and complementary to other team members' superpowers. When you get that intersection right, of aligning to your mission and to your superpowers, you are living your purpose. I can tell you there is no better thing to do with your waking hours, when you have the privilege of having that choice available to you.

Will you provide an overview of Newman's Own Foundation's work and the guiding principles of the Foundation?

As mentioned before, Newman's Own Foundation's mission is to nourish and transform the lives of children who face adversity. We're a private grantmaking foundation, which is to say that most of our work is to identify, fund, and support nonprofit organizations and tribes that are doing the hard work in their communities in service of this mission. We give grants to organizations almost exclusively in the U.S., as that's where Newman's Own sells most of its products, with a few grants made to nonprofit organizations in the U.K., Australia, and New Zealand, where products are also sold.

We have three main program areas (and thus three portfolios of grantee partners we support to realize this mission): Nutritious Food in Schools, Indigenous Food Justice, and Joyful Experiences for Seriously Ill Children.

An estimated 9 million children in the U.S. go to school and/or to bed hungry, which is a deep injustice. Without nutritious food, these children struggle to learn and focus in school, and they are at higher risk for behavioral issues, lower socio-emotional development, and preparedness to enter the workforce. That's one in eight children in the U.S., and for Native American children, that figure increases to one in four. Through our Nutritious Food in Schools and our Indigenous Food Justice portfolios, we support incredible nonprofit organizations and tribes working from

Hawaii to Maine on community-based solutions and movement-building initiatives that can support nourishing and just futures for these kids. Take Oyate Teca Project, based on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota. Connecting youth with the growing and harvesting of Native foods helps them engage more deeply with other parts of their culture – recon-

necting them with their roots, so to speak. Or Harlem Grown, where children from an urban setting are introduced to sustainable growing practices and farm-based education. These experiences put kids on a path to personal and emotional growth and greater success in school and in life.

Our Joyful Experiences portfolio relates to our longest standing and largest partnership, with SeriousFun Children's Network, a network of 30 camps and programs in the U.S. and around the world, that provides enriching experiences to children living with serious illnesses and their families, always free of charge. Founded by Paul Newman, the first camp opened its doors in 1988 in Ashford, Connecticut, and is named The Hole in the Wall Gang Camp, a nod to Newman's film, *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*.

Regarding our guiding principles, there are three to note. First is our desire to co-create change. We don't swoop in with money and answers; rather, we work together with organizations that are proximate to the communities they work with, to build trust and support sustainability. We meet them where they are, identifying strengths and needs, and giving them space to develop or scale up. Second, we fund organizations at different levels of development. In addition to our larger investments, such as with SeriousFun and FoodCorps, we seek smaller nonprofits that take a more innovative and entrepreneurial approach to problem-solving. Small grants can have an outsized impact for these organizations as they develop leadership and capacity in preparation for scaling up impact. And third, we fund flexibly. Almost all our grants are for general operating support, giving our grantee partners the flexibility to use

the funds as best they decide in service of their project.

How critical are metrics to measure the impact of Newman's Own Foundation's initiatives?

How can we have the most impact, using the resources that we have, in service of our mission? That's probably the key animating question I have as President and CEO of the Foundation. There are several sub-questions that derive from that overarching question, and one of the most important ones is: How do we measure the impact of our work and our grants over time so that we can learn and be most effective with the use of our resources?

To help us answer this question with our grantee partners, we have just hired our first Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning Officer. They will design and oversee a process that allows our grantee partners and us to learn more about our shared impact and how we can be most effective over time in service of our mission. Too often, foundation processes tend to be top-down and metrics driven, and I am certainly not in the business of wanting to create a lot of distracting work for our grantee partners by asking them to send us pages and pages of quarterly reports. Metrics are important, but certainly only one facet of a broader Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning process, and my hope is that our new staff member will work side by side with our grantee partners to help them succeed and learn. That, in turn, is how we as a foundation succeed and learn.

Will you highlight the talent and expertise of the Newman's Own Foundation team?

We're a small team – four until recently, including myself, and we have just recruited three new staff members, which is very exciting. Two of our staff members, Samantha and Kathy, have been working at Newman's Own Foundation for 14 and 13 years, respectively, and thus are an incredible source of institutional and operational knowledge and skills. The three newest team members have incredible and complementary skills and experience to our existing team members and me, whether that is bringing



SeriousFun Children's Network provides joyful experiences for children with serious illness



Oyate Teca Project connects Indigenous youth with traditional foods and culture

in Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning expertise, or decades of lived and work experience with Indigenous communities for our Indigenous Food Justice work.

What do you see as the keys to effective leadership and how do you describe your management style?

First, let me say that I see leadership as a lifelong journey of discovery: of yourself, of your team and key stakeholders, of the communities you operate in, and of the world. Thankfully, what I know now about leadership has evolved greatly over the course of the last 20 years and will hopefully continue to evolve greatly over the next 10 years.

Looking back now, my three biggest learnings these last few years in regards to leadership would be the following:

First, start with asking the right critical animating questions, especially the “why” and “how” questions. Many people get very busy at work and in life, with the “what” and the set of tasks and activities that align to that. In particular, if you and your team are not clear on the “why,” it’s very dangerous – you waste time, you might in fact have people or projects that go against your objectives, and more. The “how” questions are also very useful, I find, because they allow for evolution and iteration, and in this day and age, it’s critical to continually be open to that. In one organization I worked for, we still sent not only written letters, but also faxes, and that was in the 2010s.

Second, expand what we mean when we say, “effective leadership.” Getting a group of tasks done in record time could be one definition, especially when you only consider the short term. Getting a group of key stakeholders

aligned to move along a project together that has a buy-in and longer-term lasting power is already better. Consider that for people and work to really change, grow, and transform, on your team, in your organization, or in the world, effective leadership should also mean inclusive, compassionate, fair, participatory, relational, mutual, and more. That’s not to say that we can abrogate all hierarchies and power dynamics, or that everyone can or should have a say in all decisions – I once heard a CEO of a blockchain company say that no one at his company was in charge because the organization structure was organized as a blockchain, and I don’t think the world is quite there yet – nor was his company, it seems. But how do your team and your community grow and transform? What do you leave behind if and when you leave a job? Are a bunch of awards and titles and a well-organized database really what you want to be remembered for?

Finally, the biggest transformation you can take the lead on is always: yourself. I often go back to this quote from the Persian poet Rumi, “Yesterday I was clever, so I wanted to change the world. Today I am wise, so I am changing myself.” More recently, my friend Kevin J. Adler, who will get a kick out of this as I am including him next to Rumi, talks about taking the time to get a PhD in yourself. Lifelong discovery, self-reflection, and resilience are the starting point for, and many would even say the destination, in living a life of purpose, and then, by extension, of effective leadership.

Did you always know you had a passion for this type of work and what makes the work so special for you?

At age 10, I wanted to be a prosecutor, although I had not yet encountered discussions on restorative justice, so it was perhaps more based on too many episodes of Law & Order, dubbed in French. At age 12, I wanted to be a scientific researcher to rid the world of cancer, an ambition that carried me to university. So yes, I always had a passion for doing good in the world in some capacity, which I attribute to both my privilege – being born in a place and a time where I, unlike many others, have the choice with what I do with my waking hours – and my heritage – being the daughter and granddaughter of refugees who at some point lost much of what they had, except their education.

I did not have the temperament for pipetting small quantities of liquid and waiting for gels to run. It was critical work but not aligned to my superpowers, so scientific research was not quite for me. Luckily, I realized that early enough and went on to do a master’s in international affairs. I then joined the Boston Consulting Group to learn some business, strategic, and project management skills, and then Save the Children to apply these skills to social impact, something I have been doing ever since in numerous iterations. Steve Jobs, in his seminal commencement address at Stanford in 2005, said, “You can’t connect the dots looking forward. You can only connect them looking backward.” I felt that way when I took the job

at Save the Children and also when I took the jobs at the Clinton Global Initiative, MIT Solve, and Newman’s Own Foundation.

What makes the work so special today is that I get to work on big important problems affecting millions of underserved children and that I feel I can bring my set of unique superpowers to help, alongside great team members who each bring their own unique superpowers to complement mine. As I said earlier, there’s nothing better than being able to live your purpose, if you have that choice.

With all that Newman’s Own Foundation has accomplished, how important is it to take moments to celebrate the wins?

We could probably do better at celebrating and advertising the wins. When I tell people that the Foundation owns the food company, not the reverse, and that 100 percent of profits from the sale of Newman’s Own products go to the Foundation in service of our mission, I often get: “Oh wow, you should tell people about that.” We do put it on every bottle and package, but we’re admittedly not shouting it on rooftops the way some people with way bigger marketing budgets do when they give away 1 percent – or often less – of their profits.

In social impact, it can be hard to celebrate the wins when there are still 9 million children going to school hungry every day in the U.S., but I do think that when we do, we show that things can change, starting at the individual, family, or community level, and that there are ways to transform the status quo and build new futures for children facing adversity.

Briefly, a few of the wins we celebrate include:

- The positive momentum on free universal school meals, including our partner FoodCorps reaching 350,000 students each year in 16 states and Washington, DC, and working towards an ambitious goal of nourishing food in schools for every child by 2030; and also including great work being done by Food Resource & Action Center (FRAC), National Farm to School Network, and in New York City, Wellness in the Schools, alongside many more;
- Our ongoing partnership with SeriousFun Children’s Network, which has led to consistent development and growth of the network and its member camps and programs;
- The great work being done in support of Indigenous food justice, passing down to children Indigenous wisdom, culture, and innovation that can also serve to help all of us use our land more sustainably and feed our children; and
- The passage of the Philanthropic Enterprise Act in 2018, giving nonprofits – under limited circumstances – the ability to own for-profit businesses.

There is still so much to be done to combat the injustices and adversities facing kids in the United States, but when I meet our incredible grantee partners and hear about the impactful work they are doing, I know we’re on the right track. I invite everyone – whether they are a philanthropist, a corporate leader, an impact investor, or a committed citizen and human – to join us and our grantee partners to do what they can. ●