

COTSWOLD FAYRE*

-EST 1999-

“B”eing Better

Cotswold Fayre was started by Paul Hargreaves, the company’s CEO from his home in Deptford, South East London in the nineties. At the time Paul was working with a group of local churches as a community worker and needed a way to supplement his income. He had relatives who were artisan bakers working in the Cotswolds, Paul started to sell the bakery goods to local delicatessens and farm shops around London.

In 1999 Paul met his business partner to be and set up the company proper with offices and warehousing facilities in Reading. Starting as they meant to go on, delivering social impact alongside building a successful business, three out of the first five employees were a recovering alcoholic, drug addict and ex-offender, all of whom had struggled to gain employment.

Paul talks about his motivation, “working in the charitable sector for over a decade I came to realise that most charity work was mopping up the mess created by a combination of family and community breakdown and poor government policy. What people really needed to get their lives back on track was the opportunity of the routine of work and regular payments of salaries by businesses who cared. Starting our own business was an excellent opportunity to show that this worked.”



Time passed and as the business developed and became profitable Paul was eager to take a new “outward look” believing that businesses should be forces for good in the world. A friend introduced Paul to a project in Kenya and in 2010 he undertook a visit with his daughter who was 15 at the time.

The Bala Children’s Centre in Homa Bay, Kenya is a village boasting a primary and secondary school. The centre homes 300 children, 70% of which are orphans due to the AIDS epidemic. It exists to educate them out of poverty. Paul was so moved by what he and his daughter experienced that on their return he pledged to help the community on an ongoing basis, initially staging a charity ball which raised over £25,000. Cotswold Fayre have continued to support the project and have run three more balls since the first.

Paul says, “I realised that as we started to look out for others beyond the company’s own profitability, there were all sorts of benefits to us as a company. As we started to give out to others with our time and money, we were not only benefiting others in a very poor part of the world, but also ourselves.”

Paul continued to look for opportunities and support for the business to become an increasing force for good and in 2014 was introduced to “B Corporation Movement” by the founder of “Cook” a frozen food manufacturer/retailer who currently operate 80 shops and a home delivery service, as well as supplying their products to many of the same retail customers as Cotswold Fayre. Cook’s first shop opened in 1999 and Cotswold Fayre was one of its first suppliers. Paul comments, “Meeting a load of other people who believed that business was not only about profit, but also about using business to make the world a better place was like coming home.”

B Corporation provides a comprehensive Impact Assessment tool that a company can use to measure its impact on its workers, community, environment and customers. The self-assessment must be evidenced and is audited by B Corporation. An overall score of a minimum of 80 out of 200 must be achieved for “B Corp” certification to be awarded to the company. Alongside this the company is required to change its memorandum of association (its articles) to underwrite its ethical commitments to all of its stakeholders.

Paul talks about becoming a B Corp, “we were one of the first 40 or so B Corps when B Corporation launched in the UK, September 2015. However it just starts with your first assessment! One of the best things about the certification process is that you have to be recertified every 3 years and the bar raises every time, so it forces continual

improvement and businesses doing more to benefit the world each year. In October 2020 we are about to go through our third assessment and fully expect our score to rise significantly.”

As part of their undertaking to be a positive community influence and provide a fulfilling work environment Cotswold Fayre is doing many positive things:

The company undertook to pay the “Real Living Wage” as opposed to the government’s “National Living Wage”, which for someone working in London would result in them earning over £3,500 more a year.

“We are a £15m turnover company serving 1,700 customers so we generate “a lot” of invoices!” says Paul. “Being a food company we wanted to support a local food charity and decided to donate 25p for every invoice that we generate to the Trussell Trust Wokingham Foodbank to cover their operating costs.”

Being a B Corp also means being as environmentally friendly as possible. Currently 12% of Cotswold Fayre’s distributed products are organic and they are constantly looking to expand this.



“The biggest environmental thing for us is to do is to eliminate our carbon footprint,” declares Paul. The wholesale distribution model is a carbon-reducing business model anyway, but in 2019 Cotswold Fayre analysed its carbon impact and set about directly reducing it. Where it was currently unable to do so the organisation purchased carbon offsets to be able to declare itself carbon neutral.

Paul comments “We continue to look at ways to reduce our carbon footprint without the need to offset. One of the ways that we do this is to seek out suppliers that are also doing the same. In this regard we recently changed our logistics supplier, their operating model means that we and our customers still get the high level of service we require but their vehicles travel 1.7 million miles less than the previous operator, further reducing our direct carbon foot print by 47%!”

Cotswold Fayre is always looking to encourage all of their suppliers to become businesses that are a force for good in the world. Where possible they look to partner with B Corp suppliers. Paul adds, “we currently trade with 10 other B Corp’s, 5 already were so and we helped and supported 5 others to become such.”

In May 2019 the company ran an environmental conference; “Towards a Greener Future” to challenge, encourage and inspire suppliers to manage their environmental impact. Their next planned conference will be focused on employees. Paul comments, “Looking after and engaging with employees is a big part of the B Corp ethos. Our employees are engaged and empowered to make suggestions and decisions; the management style here is a lot less hierarchical than most businesses. We must be doing something right, as when we conducted our last employee survey 97% said that that they enjoyed coming to work, and that’s got to be good for business.”

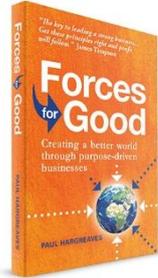


Amanda Joseph is a credit controller and has been with the company since 2013, “Working for a Company doing great things means you stand out above the rest. Last year we were awarded Business of the Year in the Thames Valley and since then we have continued to make positive changes using business as a force for good for people and the planet. At Cotswold Fayre we believe it is important to be an example for other businesses to make the world a better place. I have seen Cotswold Fayre grow over the years and been involved in many of the positive changes that have taken place of which I am very proud.”

Paul believes that it is very important for young people to understand that business is not just about profit, but more importantly how you can utilise that profit for good. Cotswold Fayre has just started working with the Education Business Partnership to deliver education on socially oriented entrepreneurship within secondary schools.

Paul excitedly explains, “Our next planned project is to open our own retail outlet, a food hall where there will be an opportunity for us to employ and train people who may otherwise, for various personal reasons, have found it very difficult to get meaningful work.”

Paul concludes, “Our journey to be a bigger and bigger force for good is non-stop, we can always do more and be better.” He continues, “It’s great to know that customers appreciate all that we do besides delivering food to them. We know people want to do business with organisations that care and that people want to work for them too.”



Paul Hargreaves is the author of: “Forces for Good: Creating a better world through purpose-driven businesses” available on Amazon.
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About B Corps

Certified B Corporations are businesses that meet the highest standards of verified social and environmental performance, public transparency, and legal accountability to balance profit and purpose. B Corps are accelerating a global culture shift to redefine success in business and build a more inclusive and sustainable economy.

Society’s most challenging problems cannot be solved by government and non-profits alone. By harnessing the power of business, B Corps use profits and growth as a means to a greater end: positive impact for their employees, communities, and the environment. The B Corp community works toward reduced inequality, lower levels of poverty, a healthier environment, stronger communities, and the creation of more high quality jobs with dignity and purpose.

B Corps form a community of leaders and drive a global movement of people using business as a force for good. The values and aspirations of the B Corp community are embedded in the B Corp Declaration of Interdependence.



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Published by: Swindon Social Enterprise Network

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