

The CEO Forum

THE QUARTERLY PUBLICATION BY CEOs FOR CEOs • SPECIAL EDITION SUMMER 2020 • THECEOFORUMGROUP.COM



15 TRANSFORMATIVE CEOs

BUILDING
BUSINESS

POST- PANDEMIC

Healthcare • Innovation • Leading Through Crisis

HEALTHCARE

Healthcare Delivery:

Dr. Steven J. Corwin • CEO
NewYork-Presbyterian

A National Model:

Jeffrey Flaks • President & CEO
Hartford HealthCare

Safety Net Hospitals:

Gary Terrinoni, President & CEO
The Brooklyn Hospital Center

Behavioral Health:

Alan B. Miller • CEO & Chairman
Universal Health Services

Wellness:

Richard Ashworth • President & CEO
Tivity Health

INNOVATION

5G:

Tami Erwin • CEO
Verizon Business

Communication Infrastructure:

Rob Johnson • CEO
Vertiv

Digital Transformation:

Mohamed Kande • Vice Chair
PwC US

COVID Solutions:

Ken Lamneck • CEO
Insight Enterprises

Financial Services:

Salene Hitchcock-Gear • President
Prudential Individual Life Insurance

LEADING THROUGH CRISIS

Community:

Sharon Prince • CEO & Founder
Grace Farms Foundation

Global Nonprofit:

Brian A. Gallagher • President & CEO
United Way Worldwide

Retail:

Nigel Travis • Chairman
Dunkin' Brands

Women Leadership:

Carly Fiorina • Founder & Chair
Carly Fiorina Enterprises

Entrepreneurs:

Kathy Ireland • Chair & CEO
kathy ireland Worldwide



Designed by SANAA, the River building was created as a porous platform for the work of Grace Farms Foundation. Structurally, the building of glass, concrete, steel, and wood is in essence a single long roof, which seems to float above the surface of the ground as it twists and turns across the landscape. (Photo: Dean Kaufman)



The CEO Forum Group has selected Sharon Prince and Grace Farms Foundation for the 2020 Transformative CEO Award in Leading Through Crisis in the category of Community. This has been bestowed for the unprecedented heroic efforts in delivering 1.5 million PPE during COVID-19, and for creating the system of five integrated foundations – nature, arts, justice, community and faith – which provide a unique, scalable model for comprehensive response for this and future crises.

Robert Reiss: Grace Farms is a different model than any community organization I have seen globally. As the founder, describe your original vision.

Sharon Prince: Well Robert, I always believe that the possibilities for Grace Farms are as open as its 80-acre landscape in New Canaan, Connecticut. When we founded Grace Farms, which is in proximity to New York City and other municipalities, the first question that we asked was, “what could we do here that cannot be done elsewhere in the world to advance good?” Then the idea for Grace Farms germinated when an architect friend of mine said, “space communicates.” This was profound to me that space could communicate a set of values, and, I surmised, could advance good for years to come.

So Grace Farms was envisioned as a new kind of public place, to be a peaceful respite and an active community in tandem where new outcomes could emerge. Grace Farms’ open, porous architecture is designed to break down bar-

riers between people and sectors, and invites us to pause and reflect, while also encouraging engagement with our five initiatives: nature, arts, justice, community and faith. We started with a clean slate to think about “what could we contribute to human flourishing?” These five initiatives are part of our answer.

The curvilinear River building became the three-dimensional expression of our vision. It is embedded in nature and creates this hopeful space for inquiry and restorative work. And we also invite the public, private and government sectors to create not only a diverse place, but a setting in which to bring forth diverse thought that can lead to actionable and authentic systemic solutions to today’s most pressing humanitarian issues. It sounds highly aspirational, and it really is.

There are many thoughtful perspectives and people are participating alongside of us because we’re an open, publicly available space. So it’s not just the private sector participating. It’s quite different to be in a place where we have both the private and the public sectors come. The public can come just take a walk and have a meal or non-profits, corporations and organizations like the United Nations University come together multi-sectorally for convenings at Grace Farms.

Our important stake in the ground in terms of justice is to disrupt modern-day slavery and gender-based violence.

How did your five initiatives position you to tackle some of the local and global challenges created by the COVID-19 crisis?

Our leadership is quite unique, and we also had the breadth and depth of our full team. When you talk about the COVID crisis, it’s about caring for our community, the value of dignity of our community, and the health and care of our community, and I’d like to backtrack for one second, because in addition to the COVID pandemic, we are in another current crisis now.

At Grace Farms, we’ve addressed the systemic effects of race in American memory. All that work that we’ve done in terms of the supply chain and how it relates to human trafficking is that we have transnational supply chain

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expertise. We also have been examining contemporary issues like modern-day slavery, that is also linked to systemic racism. So, all of these issues and initiatives go together and they might not seem like they normally would. By inviting our five initiatives to tackle contemporary issues from various perspectives and knowledge, which also happens to include expertise in supply chains and human trafficking, we were more ready than we knew to respond to the pandemic.. If you don’t have those conversations, if you don’t have investigations, a diverse team trying to do the right thing along the way, when the crisis hits, there’s no foundation there.

So the reason you’re able to give so much is because of the integration of these five elements. That’s the secret sauce, it’s the whole continuum. It’s comprehensive, it’s universal!

Right. To give you an idea how leadership played a role and how caring for our community was paramount during the COVID pandemic, we were determined not to contribute to community spread. When we closed to the public on March 9, there was only one case in Connecticut. And then we realized quite quickly that two immediate consequences of the COVID pandemic were food insecurity among us and our neighbors. Many more were asking, “Where is my next meal coming from?” And then there’s this critical lack of PPE that we needed for experienced healthcare workers and our first responders throughout the state.

So then we said, “Okay, what do we do immediately once we close?” We closed early, which also gave us an advantage because we could think through next steps. We had our team all mobilized to address the needs that were developing in real-time. Immediately we launched the Grace Farms Relief Fund for Connecticut to help close the emerging PPE gap. We first started to provide food relief within three days of closing by working with our non-profit Space Grant partners. Then we pivoted really



In 10 weeks, Grace Farms Foundation secured, donated and delivered 1.5M pieces of PPE to health care workers and first responders throughout Connecticut. (Photo: Julien Jarry)

quickly to focus on filling the critical PPE gap that our health care workers and first responders around the state were experiencing. It was on a Zoom call a week later where I committed to providing essential N95 masks for these frontline heroes and said, “Let’s fill this gap for the entire state.”

Thankfully our diverse team has a lot of first responders on it. We also have the expertise on our leadership team and through our Justice Initiative, we have a deep understanding of transnational borders, running task forces, and creating transnational networks. So, we had this array of active

collaboration between government, public and private sectors. Then, we created a humanitarian distribution hub and recognized our interdisciplinary humanitarian model provided that framework, and then, in the last two months, we have speedily delivered and donated 1.5 million PPE to healthcare workers throughout Connecticut.

I know that getting PPE seemed near impossible. How could you get 1.5 million? No one could get them.

That’s a good question. We had to first start off with creating an alliance. You can’t do it by yourself. So, we created the Grace Farms Alliance Against COVID-19, that includes corporations, organizations and institutions across sectors. Once we noticed that the state’s deals were actually turning out to be mirages, we turned back to our cross-sector method and redirected our efforts to trusted overseas suppliers.

I did reach out ... and family helps. I reached out to my sister and brother-in-law, who are both directors at Hamilton Beach Brands, and I asked them to introduce me to any of their appliance suppliers in China. That was one area.

I also reached out to two Chinese-American business women in Connecticut whom I knew had trusted supply chains as well. We were trying to develop an international supply chain, and local supply chain as well, starting here in the U.S. and in China. The diversification of suppliers is prudent, but what may not seem prudent was actually how I got it done, which was by employing unorthodox business methods. This approach enabled our purchases to come through quickly on much like a handshake deal.

So, I really banked on Hamilton Beach Brands, their trusted supplier, because they have hundreds of inspectors already on the ground in China. We did enough research to know which products we wanted to get so they would actually be used. We ended up taking a very calculated risk, so it wasn’t naive. We knew that the clock was ticking, and we felt confident that we were taking all the necessary steps really to save lives. The timeline goes like this; it’s a bit condensed. On March 26, one of Hamilton Beach Brands’ manufacturers added capacity by sourcing PPE, and at the same time China lifted their PPE export policy. So, I placed my first order for 100,000 N95 NIOSH Respirators, and we received them here only five days later.

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There was risk-taking. But you think about the healthcare workers taking risks every single day, you could see that. So, taking a risk, a business risk, was warranted.

To see this whole commitment through, I was inspired by Dr. Theresa Bowling, she’s a chief anesthesiologist, who actually volunteered to work in the COVID unit. She would offer me boots-on-the-ground input on how she was immediately using N95s when they arrived. The PPE would arrive curbside, delivered by our local fire department volunteers, and that’s a whole other discussion of how we actually distributed in real time. Once we landed those N95s, that first 195,000 were distributed that same day.

And this was like a task force kind of operation. We distributed PPE through our local emergency management team and with fire department volunteers who said that was one of their greatest moments of their history, of the department’s 138 years of volunteering. They could serve our state.

So, Dr. Bowling inspired me. Every decision became more urgent, and the need to oversee the whole operation to make sure it was going to work from start to finish was necessary, because essentially, no one had ever done this, especially not in this kind of condensed time-frame without the resources we needed. Dr. Bowling was able to articulate how being assured of the fresh N95 respirators when she and her team were in the COVID unit, elevated their

ability to actually provide focused care, not worrying about whether their PPE was going to work. They were then able to concentrate on the intubation.

She said that it offered additional psychological benefits, because they needed to return to their families, they wanted to do so without fear of being infected or even infecting their loved ones with this deadly coronavirus.

In retrospect what have you learned from this so far?

I think about most of our undertakings as CEOs, you don’t know what all the potholes might be when you visualize a path forward and make a commitment, but you do know you have to work vigorously together and use all of your resources, much like an octopus, to make it happen. Months and years from now, I want to be able to look back at this time and be able to say that amidst the pandemic, Grace Farms Foundation continued to advance our mission and values with even deeper roots to help create grace and peace in our world.

Now let’s talk about serving food to a dozen essential



It is predicted that 136,000 people in Fairfield County will go hungry this year as a result of the pandemic. The Commons at Grace Farms, which normally serves as a community gathering place with fresh food, is now a hub for preparing and donating food to those in need. (Photo: Dean Kaufman)



The expertise within Grace Farms Foundation's Justice Initiative to disrupt forced labor has helped navigate PPE supply chains. Seen above is a Justice Initiative conversation with Dr. Denis Mukwege, Nobel Peace Prize winner and Congolese gynecologist, with Nicholas Kristof, columnist for The New York Times. (Photo: Vanessa Van Ryzin)

organizations. As background, Grace Farms has its own food Commons with fresh, really good food. I know since I go there often to write my Forbes articles, and looking at all those acres of nature is great. Describe your community food initiative during COVID.

On the food side, that was something very much in our wheelhouse, because we have the Commons where we serve food to visitors and others and we also have a sustainable garden. It's quite large and we provide food to a number of local organizations like those who lead domestic violence crisis centers and others that align with our various initiatives. We already have those relationships built, so we immediately were able to call them up and ask, "What exactly do you need?"

So again, we were providing relief that was needed and could then really be able to take our whole team and concentrate on that food relief, which we're doing right now, and we will continue to do. It's become part of our DNA. Even when we re-open we will continue this work in some way.

So what is the most transformative part of your work over the past few months?

The past few months have really underlined the importance of leaning into our mission. By applying our values and our expertise, we were able to create these outcomes, and like we were just describing, maybe not just for now, but for the future of our own organization as well as for others. So it's been transformative to have the opportunity to do visible lifesaving work in providing this food relief and PPE versus the other lifesaving humanitarian work, like human trafficking work, that's often hidden from view.

So, that was what struck me. We're filling this PPE gap at the time no one in healthcare or government was able to. We were the first to deliver the N95s in bulk in Connecticut. Our work over the past

10 weeks has demonstrated that our model of using our place, our ongoing and interdisciplinary partnerships and perseverance works.

Your five initiatives give you a comprehensive perspective to solve major problems; sort of like Amazon mastering the customer intimacy process with books and then moving into everything. So what is your hope for the future of the world and of society post-pandemic?

I really love this question because at Grace Farms, our orientation is a hopeful future. The pandemic has now put global attention on supply chains. This provides us with an unprecedented opportunity to think more critically about supply chains – which is a core issue we need to tackle in order to stop human trafficking. We've been working to create a radical paradigm shift to raise awareness of forced labor in the building materials supply chain. We built a team of 50 leaders in the ecosystem of the build environment, back in September. It was the first real launching of this effort. Together, we've focused our work within the architectural sector and put a spotlight on forced labor in the building materials supply chain, the other

half of the issue, not just on construction sites. So prior to this crisis, conversations on supply chains among industry leaders, architects, engineers and others, may have just concluded with questions about sustainability of a material and nothing more. Questions were rarely, if ever, asked, if the material itself was made with forced labor. Now, as the geopolitical landscape is shifting and awareness of the supply chains has reached new heights, we have this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to create systemic change and add humanitarian criterion to our purchasing decisions and our global supply chains. We can place that much-needed spotlight on the value of human elements of these supply chains and not just sustainable ones, which I think is a significant shift.

In real time today, we're seeing this urgent conversation about human dignity and systemic racism at the forefront of national consciousness. And the COVID pandemic has already amplified racial disparities, and we recognize this reality, we stand in solidarity. Our team spans a very wide range of disciplines, which includes distinguished former federal prosecutors, a decorated federal agent and a scholarly arts creative director. We are a diverse team from a wide range of backgrounds and perspectives. Just to give you an example, we took time yesterday to listen, to coalesce and determine how we can use our will and wherewithal to take action, to convene interdisciplinary leaders to address these issues of systemic racism that would include law enforcement, artists and scholars — a diverse community—to do what we can to address this humanitarian crisis with a mode of grace and peace.

So, this is another huge challenge, and it is a challenge that we must face together. At Grace Farms we are a hopeful restorative place. Ultimately, it is my hope that out of the chaos and tragedy of this COVID pandemic we can create new opportunities and outcomes to infuse ethical criteria into our local and global supply chains and how we value each person.

On that inspirational note, Sharon, it's been terrific having you on The CEO Show.

I appreciate this opportunity and we're looking for that hopeful future.



Photo: Ryan Slack

Sharon Prince
CEO & Founder
Grace Farms Foundation

Sharon Prince is the CEO and Founder of Grace Farms Foundation, a private operating foundation established to advance good through engagement with nature, arts, justice, community, and faith. Prince spearheaded the vision for Grace Farms, a new kind of public space that blends architecture, art, and nature together into a platform for people across sectors to convene and activate the Foundation's initiatives. Grace Farms has been recognized with numerous awards for contributions to architecture, environmental sustainability, and social good.

Prince has fought to disrupt contemporary slavery and violence against women locally and globally. Most recently, she formed a first of its kind initiative, Design for Freedom, which includes the Grace Farms Foundation Architecture + Construction Working Group. GFF A+CWG brings together construction and design industry leaders and human rights experts to build awareness and create ethical building materials supply chains.

Prince has been recognized with the NYC Visionary Award from AIA New York and the Center for Architecture, NOMI Network's Abolitionist Award and Auburn Seminary's Lives of Commitment Award.

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