

# Forbes

## How Shaklee Improves The Health Of People And Planet One Product – And Tree – At A Time



Many CEOs come to the idea of philanthropy and “giving back” late in their careers, once their work has served them well as the means by which to attain their desired end: achieving financial success. [Roger Barnett](#), however, has always seen financial success as the means, not the end. He chose to go into business, he says, so he could “create some wealth, and then use wealth to make an impact.” Barnett, CEO of health and wellness brand [Shaklee](#), attributes this to the influence of his mother, Helaine M. Barnett, now in her 57th year as a public interest lawyer. His mother who had leadership roles in New York City’s largest legal aid organization and the federal Legal Services Corporation (of which she was the longest-serving president) helped shape his worldview and his desire to bring about positive change in the world.

### On a mission

At 35, after working as an investment banker, a global financier, and founder and CEO of Beauty.com, Barnett had achieved a level of success that would enable him to put into motion his plan to buy a company and harness “business as a force for change.” He took his time to find the perfect fit for him, looking at thousands of companies in a variety of industries.





In focusing more narrowly on finding an industry with considerable potential for long-term growth and the ability to make an impact, he settled on health and wellness—health from a preventive, not remedial, standpoint. This made sense to Barnett on two levels. Intuitively, he says, he felt that he’d rather spend his time helping people stay healthy. And “from a macroeconomic standpoint, the whole Western healthcare system is based on ‘Wait till you get sick.’”

Barnett set out on a search for what he calls “the leading prevention wellness company in the world.” It took five years for him to land on the natural nutrition company Shaklee, a pioneer in the model of social commerce that is also at the forefront of businesses working to combat climate change. Shaklee sells natural nutrition, personal care, and eco-friendly home care products via its 2 million distributors in Canada, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, Taiwan, China, and the US. It was also the first company in the world to fully offset its carbon emissions, becoming Climate Neutral Certified in 2000.

Barnett says he chose Shaklee because it was the first time he’d seen a company “where the very money-making activity of the business is all the things that I would want to do with my philanthropy. It’s inherently a public good, and that was my a-ha moment.” And while the company had long employed a direct sales model in which distributors purchased their own inventory and then re-sold it, when Barnett took over, he changed the structure so that products ship directly from Shaklee. He says he wanted his team to be able to focus on being “wellness advocates” and supporting their customers in their health journey, not keeping track of inventory and shipping packages.

## Earth firsts

Shaklee was founded in 1956 by Oakland, California, chiropractor Forrest Shaklee, who invented the first multivitamin in the US. In fact, before Barnett took the helm, the company already had many impressive firsts. It created the world’s first plant-based protein shake. It developed the concept of super concentration for its biodegradable cleaning products and was the first company in the world to take phosphates out of laundry detergent.

When Barnett bought the company in 2004, he sought to strengthen its commitment to sustainability and progress on climate. He joined the EPA Climate Leaders program and in 2007 Shaklee became the first consumer products company to offset 100 percent of its carbon emissions and use 100 percent green power.

Further exciting innovation came in the form of a partnership with Kenyan biologist Wangari Maathai, the first person to win the Nobel Peace Prize for environmental work. Maathai had started a grassroots tree-planting campaign for women that grew into the Green Belt Movement, which planted over 30 million trees across Africa. She challenged the Shaklee workforce to do the same, and the “A Million Trees, A Million Dreams” campaign was born, which led to members of the worldwide Shaklee team physically planting one million trees over two and a half years. This in turn inspired a United Nations campaign in which first one billion and then another five billion trees were planted by member countries.

After this, Barnett told the Shaklee family, “Because you planted one tree, there’s now six billion trees that have been planted around the world.” The lesson, he emphasized, is that “if we all do our little bit, the cumulative impact is great.” And this real impact, he says, equals success.



## Uplevelling impact

Another way the company is making an impact is through its nonprofit, Shaklee Cares, which provides direct support to families in need, demonstrating not only the company’s commitment to doing good, but to involving its workforce in that process. “With everything that we do,” says Barnett, “we want to engage the entire Shaklee community. Because that’s where we get the maximum impact.”

Shaklee Cares was started in 1992 to assist its customers who were victims of Hurricane Andrew and has since developed into something of a general emergency relief fund that has made grants of more than \$650,000 in support of 150,000 families. Barnett says that it is often a Shaklee ambassador who helps their customers apply for the funds, or who applies on their behalf. “So, if they say they need it to buy an emergency generator,” says Barnett, or “to get food for their family, we give it to them. And we have somebody who knows them, which is like a voucher for them, essentially.”

On the 25th anniversary of Shaklee Cares, Barnett says, he wanted to “rally people around the future,” which to him meant two things: “kids and the planet.” To do this, the nonprofit began partnering with two organizations. Through donations of prenatal and children’s vitamins and other nutrition products to [Vitamin Angels](#), Shaklee Cares works to build healthier futures for children in need. And via its partnership with [American Forests](#) to plant one tree for every Get Clean® Starter Kit of sustainable household products that Shaklee sells, it has helped plant approximately 76,000 trees so far.

## Purpose means people

The work of Shaklee Cares shows the power of co-creation, community, and collaboration, and why it’s so important to *Lead With We*. By engaging members of the Shaklee team in work and actions that are meaningful to them, the company builds loyalty. Barnett reports that 84 percent of Shaklee’s product ambassadors have been with the company for more than five years. The types of activities, commitments, and ideals demonstrated by Shaklee, he says, help attract people who want to work for a purpose-driven company. And by showing up to support its community, Shaklee has also built a very loyal customer base. Twenty-five percent of its sales come from customers who have been with the company for more than 30 years. “And the beautiful thing is,” he says, “the more purpose-driven we are, the more successful we are as a business.”

Of course, allowing a powerful purpose driver to stimulate business growth is not the same thing as really doing good for people and the planet. But Shaklee is an example of a business that is truly living and breathing its values.

“Our purpose and mission are to bring true wellness to the world,” Barnett says, “and we define true wellness as physical health, financial health, emotional health, and the health of our planet ... you cannot be healthy if you don’t have all of those elements.”

