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Jodi Berg

Vita-Mix Corporation

Vitamix is a family-run business managed by fourth-generation family member Jodi Berg. Under her leadership, the company is not just building its bottom line with its exceptional blenders. It is also changing how the world eats.

“The passion that came from generations before; you can take it into the future.”

Jodi Berg,
President and CEO,
Vita-Mix Corporation



You might think that the CEO of a business with millions of dollars in sales and hundreds of employees would have enough on her mind without also thinking about changing the world. But Jodi Berg, President and CEO of Vitamix, is on a mission to make the world a healthier place.

“If we can help the world grasp why food is so vital to our health and welfare, then I think we are really achieving something,” she says.



Jodi became president in 2009 and CEO in 2011.

At the heart of her quest to create a healthier world are what Vitamix makes: high-performance blenders. In fact, Jodi believes that Vitamix products have transcended the blender, becoming something altogether more advanced. “We don’t make blenders,” she says. “We make something much more than a blender.”

With consumer-oriented products such as the Professional Series 750 and the S30 personal blender, and commercial products such as The Quiet One and the Vita-Prep 3, the Vitamix range is being snapped up by customers who increasingly share Jodi’s enthusiasm for creating a healthy world. The Cleveland, Ohio-based company has seen sales rise by 500% since 2009.

And in the same period, staff numbers have grown sixfold, to around 900.

Behind this recent growth is a highly successful entrepreneurial family business that can trace its history back to 1921. That was when Jodi’s great-grandfather William Grover “Papa” Barnard began selling kitchen tools door to door.

A health food pioneer

One of the kitchen tools Papa Barnard sold was a plain and simple can opener. “Even in the depths of the Great Depression people would pay for a can opener that cost 25 cents,” says Jodi. “Not least because it was the safest way of opening cans.”

Later, Papa Barnard was introduced to a new gadget – the blender. He saw its potential to help people quickly and easily prepare healthy, tasty food.

“He focused his attention on selling this new product, which my other great-grandfather named the Vita-Mix because ‘vita’ means life,” says Jodi.

Perhaps even more significant than Papa Barnard’s sales ability was his early conversion to the importance of healthy food, which has been a constant theme in Vitamix’s 94 years of existence. Indeed, he became a pioneer in the health food industry, changing the name of his business to The Natural Food Institute.

Entrepreneurship through the generations

With the importance of healthy food always in the mind of the family, future generations continued to show entrepreneurial drive.

Bill Barnard, Jodi’s grandfather, saw the power of advertising and convinced his father to make a TV commercial. That 1949 ad, which demonstrated how the Vitamix blender can help families eat healthier with whole foods, has gone down in



William Grover “Papa” Barnard at the company’s first TV infomercial.



„Natural Foods Institute“: the first company premises.



W. G. Barnard Jr. and Ruth Pellett Barnard’s family.

history as America's first infomercial. Bill inherited the business in 1955. And nine years later, he changed its name to Vita-Mix Corporation.

Jodi's father John Barnard and his brother Frank used their engineering backgrounds to make improvements to the performance and durability of Vitamix products. And in 1985, they developed the first Vitamix commercial blender, the Mix'n Machine.

"My dad's vision established us as the first high-performance blender manufacturer for the food service industry, where our

quality, performance and value continue to set the bar," says Jodi.

Learning to love the business

Jodi is hugely enthusiastic about the business and the tremendous legacy left by previous generations. But she was considerably less interested in working at the business when she was in high school. "In between studying at school, I worked at Vitamix, doing mostly menial jobs. And I said to myself, 'This isn't what I want to do,'" she says.



During the past years, Vita-Mix Corporation was given several awards for being a "top workplace".

"The personal connection I have with the generations before me is so important. I'm constantly asking myself, can I nourish the seeds that they planted?"

Jodi Berg

So Jodi went out and got a university education, without thinking that she would use it to work for the family business. After studying mechanical engineering for a year, she found something she was passionate about: hospitality management.

She then worked for the Marriott Group and, later the Ritz-Carlton Hotel Company. Along the way, Jodi fell in love with two other things: quality control and international business. Increasingly, her reluctance to join the family business faded, especially as she saw a way of bringing her passions to Vitamix.

"My father came to me and said, 'We are starting an international division, do you want to head it up?' That gave me the incentive to come back," she says.

That was in 1997, when Vitamix had international sales of just US\$1m. Today, nearly 25% of sales are outside of the US, largely thanks to Jodi's efforts. Later, Jodi worked for the household division at Vitamix. "That was when I really realized I loved the business," she says.

From here, Jodi also began to see the growing popularity of whole foods and how Vitamix could play a crucial role in this trend. But to have that healthy lifestyle with a Vitamix blender is not cheap. Some of the company's products for home consumers sell for more than US\$600. Jodi says that the price is more than worth it.

"They are the least expensive product you will buy because of how much you will use them," she says. "The value of our products exceeds the price, because they are designed to last decades, even generations."

Nourishing the seeds

Jodi became President in 2009 and CEO in 2011. She and the company she leads are focused on maintaining the entrepreneurial drive for continued success. Nevertheless, there is also very much an eye on Vitamix's past. "The passion that came from generations before; you can take it into the future,"



The Headquarters of Vitamix in Cleveland, Ohio.

says Jodi. "The personal connection I have with the generations before me is so important. I'm constantly asking myself, can I nourish the seeds that they planted?"

And what about the next generation? Can those seeds continue to be nourished? Jodi's children are still very young. But one thing she will insist upon is that they must become successful in their own right. With an obvious reference to her own experiences, Jodi says they should spread their own wings: "They will need to figure out what they are really passionate about."

Business leaders often talk about passion, but few talk about it in the context of making the world a better place. For Jodi, it is all part of the same thing. If Vitamix continues to grow, then she knows that she is on her way to creating a healthier world. After all, that is what Vitamix has been doing since 1921.

Jodi Berg

President and CEO

Company name: **Vita-Mix Corporation**

Generation(s): **4th**

Founded: **1921 in Cleveland, Ohio, US**

Industry: **Kitchen appliances**