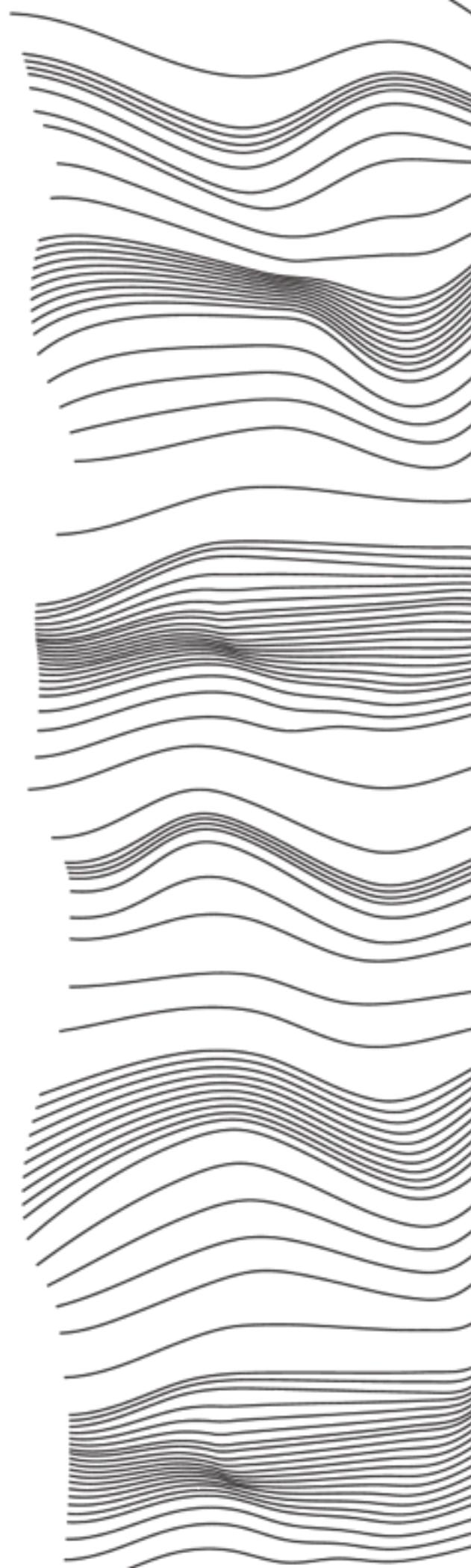


Lime Red

Defy Convention Podcast

Season 02: Episode 03

Conscious Fashion Business Leaders &
Consumers in a Capitalist Society with
Laura Hall



EPISODE TRANSCRIPT

Emily

Hi, everybody. Welcome to DEFY Convention. Today, we are interviewing my good friend, and I've known Laura – my good friend Laura Hall – who I've just known, I feel like, for ages. I think you were one of the first people I met in my journey in this conscious business situation back in the day at the first Conscious Business Leaders lunch, or Conscious Leader summit.

Laura is a global business leader in the fashion and consumer goods industry. That's one of the most like pollutive industries in the world. So we just connected right away and she left her last corporate role as president of accessories for Polo Ralph Lauren. She joined forces with two other female C-suite executives to create WHYZ Partners.

It's a different kind of business advisory collective. WHYZ Partners offers retailers and brands a 21st century toolbox for how to build profitable, triple bottom line business in a new abnormal consumer goods ecosystem.

We talk a lot about regenerative economies and sustainable business with Laura. She's so interesting to talk to. I'm so glad to have her today. We talk about—I got to be a part of Laura's children's book about the *ABCs of Conscious Capitalism for Kids* because Laura believes that it's easier to build strong children than to repair broken men, as Frederick Douglas said over a century ago.

Thank you so much for joining us, Laura.

Laura

I'm so honored to be here and to be with my good friend, Emily. Thank you for having me. This is awesome.

Emily

Yeah, it's so cool because our whole premise for this podcast is about, you know, looking at an industry and saying like, *Forget it, I'm doing something different*. And what bigger industry than fashion to say, *yeah, no, we're not doing it that way, we're going to do it a totally different way?*

I remember you had like a book about, sustainable fashion brands. And this was years ago. I mean, we met years ago. And you had a guide. You were there with resources; you were

handing them out to people. You're like, "This is what we should do." And this was before a lot of brands were moving into that arena or talking about it.

Before there were directories or, or even little Chrome extensions saying these brands are sustainable, or these brands are doing the right things. Before it even blew up. You were there doing this work. Tell us a little bit more about how you got started, or why this matters to you, or why you do this kind of work.

Laura

Woohoo. Okay.

Emily

Woo! Get in it. Or, whatever, you know what Laura, you're so cool. You can really talk about whatever you want because you're just one of my favorite people.

Laura

This is awesome to be able to have a conversation with somebody like you, Emily. I've been on some podcasts recently, and everybody wants to talk about fashion now. But you're right; I did get committed to it a long time ago.

I got committed because first: when I was working for Burberry, a brand, a wonderful brand, I began to realize we were running up against finite resources, I was beginning to get to know factories and seeing how they made everything and realized that we had a problem.

Then I went to Ralph Lauren, and the problem was still there. And I thought, well, this is an industry problem. Then I started to do my research and, yeah, fashion is arguably the second dirtiest industry on this planet. So, in case your listeners don't know that: it's a dirty, dirty industry, and fashion touches everybody and affects everybody.

And I like to say it touches everybody and everybody touches it because unless you're living in a nudist colony—and I haven't met any recently, I admire them if they want to do that—but you know, most of us get up every day and we have to put on something to wear. And we don't think about the impact.

We are what we buy. We are what we don't buy. I'm very, very committed to helping educate consumers, because I think, Emily, that unless we begin to do that better as an industry,

we're not going to get a big change because we're consumers first; and the United States is not really known for taking really good steps in terms of how we buy fashion.

Fast fashion is not good. We need to start changing the narrative so that we can change the impact. Just to give everybody a perspective: fashion is a \$1.3 trillion industry.

Emily

Whoa, whoa, bonkers.

Laura

Whoa. Yeah. Bonkers. So, we gotta fix it. I believe education is key. It's why I believe it starts young. So the *ABCs of Conscious Capitalism for Kids*, which you very graciously agreed to participate in, is really important because we've got to start by telling future generations there's a different way to buy.

There are different things that you can do, and we've got to start helping companies get connected with consumers in a different way so that they can create better customers.

Emily

Yeah. What are some things we can think about? I've been trying not to, well, I try not to buy anything, but that's not because of – I don't know, mostly because I'm just cheap. I just don't want to buy anything. I've been looking for sustainably made things.

Sometimes I don't even know what I'm looking for. So I've been buying things from like this brand called Pact or Everlane. I like that brand. I like Athleta because they're a B Corp. So when I see B Corp, I figure like, well, they're probably doing some things right. I don't know too much about their supply chain or their [pollution].

I figure like on the aggregate, they're probably doing some things okay-ish. I gotta be honest, I'm not doing that much research mostly because I just don't, I'm lazy. I don't have too much time. I'm not the best consumer. I try to do a lot of things. It seems like there's a lot of pressure on the consumer to do a lot of research.

I really try to do zero waste in my kitchen. I do MightyNest. I try to replace everything. I don't like plastic in there. I don't like to do a lot of single use anything. See, I'm wearing recycled underwear right now. I've got my Athleta pants on. I've got my recycled, vegan Birkenstock

shoes, you know, I try to be really good. I think I own maybe five pairs of shoes completely. You know, that kind of stuff. [I'm a] Patagonia person. But I'm also a weird B Corp person. You know, we all know this, so I'm definitely not a fast fashion consumer.

However, I do shop at target. I have kids; they burn through clothes really, really fast. It's really hard to keep up. They blast their knees, they're are covered in dirt. They get crap, and paint, and s*** on their stuff all the time. It's tough, you know? It's crazy, but I'm also not shopping at like Forever 21 and H&M and doing all that kind of stuff either.

I know that is a really pollutive [thing]. I also really love thrifting and buying stuff. I love thrifting. That's one of my favorite things. I wish we could do that. It feels like there's a lot of stuff we just don't know. I don't know where things come from. Don't know who made them. I don't know if they're being paid at a living wage. I don't know what to do with my clothes once I'm ready to get rid of them.

I feel bad about throwing them out. So I just keep them for a really long time. Or my neighborhood has this great thing called Free Box where I “free box” a lot of my clothes, and I give them away. I put them in bags on my front porch and then people just take them, and we reuse them. I get most of my clothes on Free Box, which is one of my favorite things in the whole world.

But that feels like a real band-aid to a big problem. I'm trying to do the best I can, but there's this like huge — if it's a true multi-trillion-dollar industry and I'm sitting over here, like I'm doing the best I can. It really feels like not enough.

So, what are some things...it's like recycling? Like, I know that me recycling my stuff is not going to solve the bigger problems. So, what are some things that can make a dent in this, from your perspective in the industry?

Laura

Well, you've hit on several things that hopefully I'll take umbrage. You are actually not a typical consumer. When you said [that] you're too busy and you don't know enough, you know a lot. I mean, you've made some decisions that we would like for other consumers to make because the goal is to convert consumers to conscious consuming and buying and to think about [their buying decisions].

I think being an educated ignorance is probably one of the biggest reasons. And so, I believe that there are certain organizations and certain things [to help learn]. If you don't know anything, I would say there are B Corps and you've hit it.

If you don't know anything today, start making a decision on what to buy in your closet – your fashion decisions – have them be either a B Corp or a fair trade. And any brand that's fair trade or B Corp, it tells you that. I would say that there are other groups in the luxury arena where – we're working with a company in the UK called Positive Luxury, and there's a Butterfly Mark.

So we're trying as an industry to begin to market and communicate and message differently, and to give people symbols or tools or some easy guidance on who to buy. I'm trying very hard.

Our industry and the people I'm working with, we're celebrating the brands who are doing well. Athleta is terrific because they're a B Corp. Eileen Fisher is a B Corp. Patagonia, I mean, you've hit. Patagonia and Eileen Fisher are two North stars.

Emily

I love Eileen Fisher. I love her stuff.

Laura

So do I. A chic company. So, if you're in doubt I have a-I keep my list updated. I did an event recently with another great brand: Sharleen Ernster, who's a conscious capitalist, has a lingerie company. I would love to share my list and the Conscious Capitalism Conscious Fashion list with your audience. And this is all about sharing and building a community because we can't do it alone.

But I'll say two pieces of advice. If you're a consumer or you're conscious brand, or you're a fashion brand listening today, and you're thinking, *I need to try to do something differently*, and you want to be different and you want to be conscious, but you don't know what to do. Two pieces of advice:

First, just start somewhere. Take a stand. Pick something that you feel strongly about, and just start to make a change. Start somewhere in your business to do something that's going

to help your brand become more conscious, or eco-friendly, more sustainable, more triple bottom line.

The second one: this is one that I live with and use with our clients and with myself, is just make progress. Progress over perfection. We are all trained that if it's not perfect, we're not going to do it. We have clients who say, "Well, I can't start that marketing campaign because we haven't nailed everything." No, start and just make progress. Don't let perfection be the enemy of progress.

We've all got to start somewhere to do this, or it won't change. I'll say another thing, which is, we all have said, "If we can't change the world, maybe as a brand or in our lives, we're not going to try." Just start by changing your world. I love what you have in your community. What do you call it? A flat box? Free Box!

Emily

Free Box! Oh, my favorite thing in the whole world. And I got to know my neighbors. It's a win-win all the time. And then there's a kid's edition, which is the best.

So we trade all our kids' stuff and get rid of all our kids' stuff. It's the best. Like, I've gotten exercise pants. I decluttered my house. I've gotten rid of so much crap and found so much stuff. And then there's also "in search of." So, like, "in search of blah, blah, blah, immersion blender." somebody has an immersion blender that they're not using and better to get rid of it.

The coolest thing in my neighborhood, that we haven't done in in two years in this pandemic, is our neighborhood garage sale. So I live in this fancy neighborhood in Chicago. My neighborhood is the most diverse neighborhood in Chicago. It's called Albany Park. And every May, we have a neighborhood garage sale, where like 200 people have a garage sale on the same day.

And it's the most fun day of the year. Everyone opens their garages. The alleys are full of garage sales, and it's like the party central: bands and hotdog carts and everything. It's so fun. Well, we haven't been able to do that. So the free box has just been the best. And I got rid of my old wedding dress on Free Box.

I got rid of coats and stuff and people are just like so thankful. And it's so much fun to just trade your stuff. I got kids toothpaste, and I don't know, just so much nonsense.

I thought of a small business idea. And I was thinking about this little business idea, like a side-hustle, the other day, because I figured out I had this little problem, and I was like, you know what? I kind of want to start this little business idea, but I really don't want to spend any money.

So I looked on free box and sure enough, somebody was given away the exact thing I needed to start this business. And so I free boxed it, and I got this little thing, it's sitting in my garage. I'm going to go make it. I'm going to see if I can sell it. If I can sell it, test it a couple times.

You know, I've done a couple of surveys on there just to like test an idea. I'm not going to go spend a whole bunch of money, but it's like the best testing ground for ideas and like very, very small use cases for business that I've ever found. And it's the best up-cycling, free, cool, easy, neighborhood camaraderie that I've ever [seen]. And I've just been able to also get to know the community. And it's fun.

It's just so much fun. There's no drama. Well, there's sometimes there's drama, but people “free box” leftover dinners, which is weird in a pandemic, or like old bananas to make banana bread. I mean, it's literally the craziest thing, but I love it. It's like people are just frugal, and it's terrific and not wasteful. I love it. I really do.

We need more of this. Or people find stuff in the alleys, and we'll post like, “Hey, cool thing in the alley.” And I've been driving around the alley trying to find it, somebody already got it. But I just love it too, because I feel like it's, it's just this respect for things that have been made, and this idea that things are not disposable. And I really liked that.

Laura

I agree with you. I really believe in community building. I don't think we can do everything top down. I think we need a top down and a bottom up strategy to solve this fashion industry problem. Pretty much just like we needed to solve any other problem.

But fashion is a global problem, and it's huge. When it's that big [of] a business, it affects everything on this planet. And as we say, “There is no planet B. There's no plan B.” There will be

no business to be done on a dead planet. There is no fashion business if we can't breathe the air, drink the water, and our industry, my industry, is got to get a grip on that.

We are working hard, we are making progress, but I think the next wave is to really get educating every consumer. And it starts, I think, at the community level as much as at the corporate level. What you're doing in your community is a microcosm of what I'd like to see in the fashion industry, [and what the industry] needs to see in every community.

So anything I can do and the company and the brands we work with, it's all about how to create a community first and then grow from there. Because the big companies are being—we were putting pressure on big companies like Nike, Adidas; they are all moving the needle now. We just have to continue.

And I love one of the things that you've said recently is that we've got to think about momentum. We've got to think about justice. Well, both of those, climate justice and fashion, are linked. If we clean up the climate, one of the ways to do that is with my industry; it's a dirty industry. And momentum is a great thing. So, we've got it now. Let's not lose it.

Emily

Yeah. One of the ways to keep momentum is to keep people like you, and me and the people we interview on this podcast like going, right?

Laura

Absolutely. This podcast touches people. Me being on this podcast today, if it can unlock or open the door or create an opportunity for one brand, two brands, one consumer, two consumers, the ripple effect is a powerful thing. And we're seeing it right now on every level.

And the thing about the fashion industry is it does touch every one of those justice issues: social justice, climate justice, health, all of the things that happened to us in the past 12 months in terms of what we found when we started shining a light on everything because we were forced to is hopefully helping us make better decisions and make them faster. I don't do anything. I'll tell you, Emily.

One of the things that I've decided and learned is I'm very intentional. Now. I say no more often than I say yes. But when I say yes, it's a powerful yes. So your quote in the book, the *ABCs of Conscious Capitalism* —

Emily

Yes that's right.

Laura

I want everybody listening today to say yes to trying to be a more conscious fashion consumer.

Emily

Yeah, my whole idea was saying yes [and] think[ing] about everything you have to say no to, in order to say yes. Which is a lot of stuff.

Laura

You said a lot there, girl, I better read your quote, "The power of yes is all about the power of focus. Think about it. You get to choose how to invest your unique, abundant, wonderful energy into whatever you say yes to." So, today please, anybody listening say yes to becoming a conscious fashion customer.

Emily

I liked that. And it is like a little bit more spend-y to do that, but I think you have things that last longer that are well made. You feel good about it. You feel good about putting them on; you feel proud of what you have. Like, my friend made this shirt; I feel good about it. My shirt actually says "manatees against mansplaining," if you can see it.

Laura

I need it. Oh, I grew up in Florida. I personally water ski next to manatees. So, manatees are one of my favorite animals and they're one of the, maybe the only animals that has no DNA for violence. I love manatees. So you touched my heart there.

Emily

I can literally get behind this shirt every day.

I want to ask you – I think we should talk again, like another time about Lynne Twist and about the Pachamama Alliance, and all of the work that you're doing and your new friendship with her and all of these things.

But I know that we've talked a little bit about that at the beginning when we first got on this call, but those things seem like – I read her book and I am so intrigued by her work. I wish I could go there and do those things.

It seems rejuvenating to think about the work we do on a large scale and about what it means to humanity, because I know that we can kind of get in the weeds of like, okay, I'm doing this, I'm making this list, I need to fill in the spreadsheet, I need to make this phone call; the day to day.

But then, to almost literally zoom out and think about it at scale of like, what is this doing to our species? Or what is this work doing for us on our trajectory as a planet?

And then to think about it as connection to our own life. How does this feel? How are you doing? I guess is the simple question. How are you keeping yourself together? How are you... We've known each other for a really long time.

You've had a rough year. I don't want to ask you anything that's too sensitive, but how are you progressing? How are you keeping it? How are you continuing this work? How is this continuing to be meaningful to you?

Laura

Wow. One day at a time is a pretty good mantra because there's really nothing else you can do. We live one day at a time. I'm trying to live in the moment. I would say that taking care of myself now, and you talk about mental health and how important that is. It is important. It is critical.

Going to the Amazon rainforest two years ago with Lynne Twist and Pachamama Alliance was an experience that I had no idea, Emily, how much it would change my perspective, my decision-making, [and] my sense of what was important. It radically changed a lot of things for me.

And over the past 12 months, a lot of good stuff has happened in spite of a lot of bad stuff that's happened. We've all had personal loss in the past 12 months. A lot of us have had business loss, but we're going to be okay.

I think resilience is a great thing. And I believe in it. Nature is resilient, and I do something now, Emily, that I didn't do before. Every single day, every single day, I touch nature. I go for a walk. I garden. I dig in the dirt. I do something every single day now that gets me connected back to nature.

Being in the Amazon rainforest and seeing the biodiversity there and realizing how fragile it is; it was really powerful. It makes you realize how connected we all are, and how important appreciating how sacred all life is; it's really what connects us all.

We're all connected on this planet. And being there with the people, the indigenous nations who have been fighting so hard to keep and preserve our mother earth, Pachamama means Mother Earth. It's important.

And I would add that it's important for all of us females. You and I have had had conversations about how important female empowerment is and Lynne Twist the whole Pachamama thing; we're getting ready, if we listen to the indigenous people, we're getting ready for this 21st century to be what's called the Sophia century, which is about the century where women will take their place alongside men.

And we will create – we have the possibility of creating a truly just sustainably, socially just, environmentally, sustainable, spiritually strong place and presence on this earth. The earth is going to be fine without humans, but we need to respect it or we won't be here. And it's one of those moments that we've got, this is a moment in history, I believe for us to make some decisions that are going to define the rest of our species.

Emily

Yeah. I mean, this is, it's critical. It's a critical moment. There's no denying that. It's a make or break for all of us. Yeah. I mean, we know that.

Laura

I'm an optimist. I believe in optimism. I believe, when you go out, when I go out every day, you know, I will tell you something funny. The first few months during the pandemic, I walked every day, and I live in Southern California, and there beautiful canyons and places to take nature walks.

And I would walk in my neighborhood. And one day, I actually went up to a tree, and I thought about it. And I'd said, I don't care. I'm just going to hug that tree. So I am now a tree hugging

Californian. I love trees. I love nature. We all need to connect if we haven't back nature, physical health.

Emily

Yeah, absolutely. Yeah. It's funny because we were so landlocked, I live in Illinois, which is like, okay. And we couldn't go anywhere. So, my girlfriend and I were planning on going somewhere in January like Mexico or somewhere great for my birthday. And instead we went to Galena, Illinois, which is a three hour drive west to here, but I mean, it was gorgeous.

And we were like, we can explore and find the beautiful things in our state. And there's beauty everywhere. We don't have to go somewhere crazy to find it. There's everything around, it's growing and alive.

I can go in my backyard. I mean, it was just a new found adoration for things just right here in front of me, which was it's nice. It is. I mean, sure. I would love to be in Southern California or in a place with mountains or something else other than very flat land and corn, but it was stunning there actually, it looked like we were in Ireland or somewhere else.

Laura

I think every place has beauty.

Emily

We do, we actually have quite a bit, and it was beautiful and we have the lake and it was gorgeous and we've just been having a great time, actually getting to know [Illinois]. We always think we need to get out of here, but we've been getting to know actually where we live and it's been quite nice.

Laura

No place is perfect. I may live in a place that's got pretty good weather, but we've got our share of things. You know, [California] needs rain all the time. It's, it's a kind of desert xeriscape place. Every biosphere, every place on the planet has something wonderful and something not so wonderful. The great thing is to respect it and figure out what it offers.

I happen to think that nature has, and is, and able to teach us all things about fashion. We're learning to do things so that hopefully we're not going to keep extracting resources, having plants that are helping us make a new thing like, oh, you know what? We don't need leather

from cows. We can create things in laboratories, now, like with bamboo. I'm wearing a shirt today made out of bamboo.

So there, there are really, really amazing things happening. And technology, I always look at technology, [it] can be your best friend or your enemy. And I will tell you that sustainable fashion companies are using technology and science to create better ways to make product that doesn't extract things from the earth and starts regenerating.

That circular economy thing is critical in fashion and regenerating and sustaining. Those are not just words. Those are things we all have to think about, but I'll say it again. What we wear is — people think a lot about what we put in our bodies, food beverages, that industry very, very much a leader right now, and thinking about how we create better product for the planet and for people.

Fashion's getting there, but what you wear affects everything. So we've got to start thinking about it. Just start thinking about it. Start somewhere, like I said.

Emily

Yeah. And when we post this podcast, we're going to post all your links and all your resources and everything. And I can't wait to share them with everyone because it is so important. And B Corps have taken a major steps into this regenerative economy. And I know that there's a new B Corp store launching soon, I think, I mean, by the time this podcast comes out, it'll be launched. So that's for sure.

Laura, it's always such a joy to talk to you. I hope we get to see each other at Eileen, or in the redwoods or something soon.

Laura

I agree. My next big wish is that all of us fabulous world changing women get together again soon.

Emily

All right, Laura, thank you so much for being on Defy Convention. All right. Thanks everybody. We'll see you next time.