

Purpose & Impact *Now*

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The Higher Purpose of Tobacco Companies



Dear Katja,

Old cigarette ads are among the most baffling examples of greenwashing in recent history. 'Take a Puff, it's Springtime': I found this beauty in the Stanford University web repository of tobacco advertising.

The lady in the 1969 ad reminds me of pictures of my mom, in her early twenties at that time. She was a cheerful, fashionable Belgian blonde who fell madly in love with the shy and reserved Dutch guy who would become my dad. My parents were both heavy smokers and the ideal consumer audience for this kind of marketing.

The brand of choice for my young mom and dad was Gauloises, famed tobacco from France in an era when anything French – from existential Nouvelle Vague cinema to books and pop music – was considered irresistibly Bohemian and Chic. Finally, public awareness grew that smoking was

not hip but harmful. My parents became anti-cigarette crusaders, like many people from their generation. This kind of treacherous advertising was eventually banned.

The ad is one of hundreds in the Stanford collection that associate smoking with freshness, nature and freedom. It leaves me feeling bewildered (how is it possible that intelligent people like my parents fell for this deceitful stuff?). At the same time, it fills me with hope.

We are still surrounded by many examples of greenwashing coming from companies in all kinds of industries. Fortunately, today we also have a conscious consumer movement that's much bigger than the anti-tobacco wave in the 60s and 70s – and growing. Sometimes cynicism and fatalism creep in ('Why bother? Nobody can beat the economic megapower of selfish corporations'). But I think the history of tobacco marketing is a promising example. It shows how persistent fact-finding and sharing of the health risks and social damage caused by a product succeeded in pushing back an enormously powerful industry lobby.

Cigarettes are not gone from our lives, but shameless advertising has. Smoking is banned from public spaces and governments have restricted cigarette sales. Tobacco giants, once untouchable, are revisiting their raison d'être, upscaling their investments in smoke-free products and rephrasing their purpose.

Or... is this corporate soul-searching just another twist in the fine art of greenwashing?

Below, we'll delve a bit deeper into purpose-led business. I also shine a light on an inspiring example of authentic mission-driven leadership in a related area, the Sustainable Development Goals, which are halfway into their implementation period this month.

Enjoy reading!

#WordOfTheWeek - Purpose-driven business

In this section, I pick words that stand out in the socially responsible and sustainable business space and share my take on why they are important for impact leaders.

Purpose-driven business – This is one of my favorites.

'Purpose' has become a buzzword among companies. Across sectors, businesses are issuing 'Purpose Statements' and launching 'brands with purpose'. Even fossil fuel and tobacco producers line up to demonstrate how they outperform others by

pursuing a world-changing purpose. The magic word means many things to many people.

At FairChange, we like to stay true to its original spirit & soul.

Doing purpose-driven business means contributing to the solution of a pressing societal challenge and putting it at the core of your business. It means incorporating that social or environmental cause into your business model, products, and services, and prioritizing it in all the decisions you make. When conflicts of interest arise – as so often happens in business, just as in life – it means putting purpose first, not profit.

Can companies that sell harmful products, engage in human rights abuses and damage the environment be purpose-driven? Not in the true sense of the word. And how about transforming tobacco companies like Philip Morris International? They still earn the majority of their profits from old-school cigarettes. But they are launching new non-nicotine products and proclaim their purpose is achieving a cigarette-free future in just over a decade.

Should we give them the benefit of the doubt?

Whatever your answer to that question, the truth is that purpose is never perfect. For almost any company, pursuing a higher social goal beyond profits is a work in progress, even if (unlike tobacco or fossil fuels corporations) they have doing good for people and the planet baked into their DNA.

This complexity is one of the things that makes purpose in business so fascinating, if you ask me. You'll definitely see me posting more on this, so stay tuned!



The Colombian women who created the SDGs

Businesses and other organizations around the globe are working hard to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. The clock is ticking rapidly towards the 2030 deadline: this month, we're halfway into the implementation period.

There are many reasons to be pessimistic: the combined effects of a global pandemic, war, climate change and economic recessions have caused serious setbacks.

Few people know that the SDGs were invented by two Colombian women back in 2011. Their exceptional origin story is a source of inspiration. Read how purpose and perseverance led government officials Paula Caballero and Patti Londoño to overcome skepticism and hostility – and succeed in having the 17 SDGs endorsed by all nations in 2015.

[READ STORY](#)

#CaptivatingQuote

"To be authentic is to be at peace with your imperfections. The great leaders are not the strongest, they are the ones who are honest about their weaknesses. The great leaders are not the smartest; they are the ones who admit how much they don't know."

Simon Sinek, English-born American inspirational speaker, author of 'Start with WHY'

Well, that's it for now.

In the upcoming weeks, I'll be sharing the updated version of the FairChange Checklist for making Purpose-driven decisions I am now working on. It is another free FairChange resource that helps you lead with impact and do business in a people and planet positive way. Don't miss it ;).



Have a great week!

Katja Marianne

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About Purpose & Impact Now

This is a newsletter with updates, tips and resources about doing business with a higher purpose and leading with positive impact. Please reply with any questions or feedback. I personally respond to all emails. Delighted to build a better world together! // Katja

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