

LEAD WITH WE
SEASON 3: EPISODE 015
Rick Ridgeway, Patagonia

Simon Mainwaring:

From We First and Goal 17 Media, welcome to Lead With We. I'm Simon Mainwaring, and today I'm joined by Rick Ridgeway, the former VP of environmental initiatives at Patagonia who remains very close to the company and continues to consult for them. He's also the author of an amazing new book called Life Lived Wild. And we'll discuss the heart and soul of Patagonia and how that drove their business growth and global impact and insights from his life as one of the world's top mountaineers and how that can shape your leadership, and what every business leader and entrepreneur can and must do to build their business by better serving the planet. So, Rick, welcome to Lead With We.

Rick Ridgeway:

Simon, it's great to be here with you. Thank you so much for having me.

Simon Mainwaring:

Now, I've got a full disclosure to everybody, Rick and I go a little way back. I think it was 10, 12 years ago through a mutual friend, somebody said, "Hey, you should meet this guy, Rick Ridgeway." Because I was interested in purposeful business. And not knowing anything about me, he kindly met in West LA and we had a great conversation and he really inspired me to believe that business as a force for good was possible. And since then I consider him a friend, a colleague, a mentor. So I'm thrilled to have some time to share your insights with everyone, Rick. Welcome.

Rick Ridgeway:

Well, thank you again, Simon. Those were kind words.

Simon Mainwaring:

So Rick, you obviously had a career before Patagonia, yet to many you're synonymous with Patagonia. So tell us a little bit about your career as a mountaineer, as a writer, as a filmmaker, and then how you came into connection with Patagonia, which then set that next chapter of your life in progress.

Rick Ridgeway:

Well, as a young boy, I became obsessed with climbing and mountaineering, adventuring and exploring. And I learned to make a living at that through photography, filmmaking, storytelling, lecturing, consulting at the outdoor business. And then in the mid 1980s, I started my own business, a content licensing agency that licensed film and photography to advertising agencies. And we specialized, as you might imagine, in outdoor imagery. I sold that company very successfully in 2000 and then returned to filmmaking and writing. And then two years later, I got an invitation from Patagonia, from my climbing partner, Yvon Chouinard, who founded and still owns Patagonia with his wife to join the company. I asked my wife if that was a good idea. I was a little hesitant to work for a company owned by one of my best friends and she said, "Rick, you always like to tell me you like to try new things. So why don't you try this thing called having a regular job."

Rick Ridgeway:

So I joined the company in 2004 as a full-time employee. I had a 15 year run there that was terrific for me, terrific for the company. And then during the pandemic, I decided to make a transition, left the company, and now I'm back to writing and filmmaking. But very importantly to me, I spend half of my time now doing volunteer work for conservation and environmental nonprofits. It's like I'm in a dream position.

Simon Mainwaring:

And I mean, obviously the theme of your life, your commitment to the natural world is clear as day. And sometimes you take that for granted with people. You just presume that's the way they are, but where did that start? Was it that national geographic subscription that your mom gave you that you talk about in Life Lived Wild? Was it Jim Whitaker, the first American to kind of summit Everest? What was it that made you so committed to the environment?

Rick Ridgeway:

Well, it's all those things, but as I explained in the book, Simon, it was a long arc, an arc that's lasted my entire lifetime. An arc from in the beginning, focusing on the adventures, focusing on the explorations, focusing on the friends and colleagues I was going with and the friendships that I was building from those experiences, focusing on the places where I was doing the adventures. And then over a lifetime, it switched from that little by little, experience by experience to saving the places where I was having those adventures in my youth. And that's what I think the theme of the book is as well. I didn't set it out that way, but I discovered that writing the book, that that's been the arc of my life, from adventures in the places to a commitment to saving the places. And those places are the natural places on our home planet earth.

Simon Mainwaring:

And I want to push in on that a little bit more because it's so interesting. If you look at any landscape, there are those that want to stay safe in the foreground, close to home. There are those that will go in the middle ground and stretch themselves and be adventurous. Then there are people like you that want to go to the most remote ends of the planet, the most extreme, the edge of the world, as you talk about. What is it about that? Why was it? And also I think relatedly, is that what you mean by wild? Because sometimes Life Lived Wild, when you think about the word wild, people think it's reckless, but you seem drawn to the most remote and wild places. Why?

Rick Ridgeway:

Well, in the book and to me, I use the word wild to mean what's left on our home planet of wild nature, nature that is relatively untouched by the hand of we human beings. And I have been drawn to those places on the planet since I was a little boy. When I was 10 and 12 years old, I got into a business raising pheasants with my grandfather and I had a backyard zoo with about 15 species of pheasants. And I could tell visitors to my backyard zoo every place that they came from. And those were the places that captivated my imagination that I said, I want to go there someday. I want to see these birds in the wild. I want to experience wild nature in those places. And in fact, if you look in the background here, see those pheasants up on my wall there? Yeah. Well, those are prints of pheasants I bought when I was 12 years old. I've kept them with me my whole life. And they represent to me what wild nature means. So it's been a central part of who I am since I was a young boy.

Simon Mainwaring:

So it's the natural world in its purest form, and by going there, you felt the need to protect it. And the reason I'm leaning in on this so heavily is because a lot of people would say, what's so unique about Patagonia? What's that secret source? Why is it so special? Why are they at the forefront of this business for good movement for so long? And I think it really turns on the alignment between who you are as a person and what you do in your daily life. They're so fully integrated, it's seamless that it's just living and breathing the way you're showing up in the world. Would you say that's fair?

Rick Ridgeway:

Yeah. Yeah. I would say that's fair. And also that brings up the idea or the topic as it were of what lessons in nature might actually apply to business. It's an interesting question to ask what people like myself or my friends, Yvon Chouinard, who founded Patagonia, Doug Tompkins, a really close friend who founded The North Face and sold that to found the women's wear company, Esprit. These are my climbing partner. We've spent so much time in deep wild nature and we've brought what we've learned from there back to sea level, applied them to our businesses and those businesses have been successful. I mean, obviously Patagonia and The North Face together have changed and even founded the whole industry of outdoor recreation equipment.

Simon Mainwaring:

And I want to stress this for everybody listening, because my experience of the corporate world or often entrepreneurship is we do what we do in business and if we can, we can integrate who we are as a whole human being. But if I hear you correctly, you really are about celebrating who you are as people with your peers and bringing that back into business. So you lead with who you are and your experience of the natural world, rather than it being the exception to the rule.

Rick Ridgeway:

It's totally integrated. It completely is. When you spend time in nature and I mean, wild nature where nature is running the show, that you learn things about yourself and about who all of us as human beings came from that create an awareness that you can bring back and apply to your life at sea level to your businesses. I'm amazed how few business people seem to realize this, but at the very highest level, all of our businesses, whether we're in business of consumer goods or services, all of our businesses depend on a healthy planet. And that's because we need a healthy and renewable stream of resources and in turn, we need to all remember that all societies depend on a healthy planet and that in turn, you can't have a healthy market without healthy societies or healthy markets without healthy societies. So there's this deep connection between healthy business and healthy planet that a lot of business people just don't seem to get or to understand.

Rick Ridgeway:

I mean, we could say clearly that Elon Musk and Jeff Bezos is the number one and two richest people on the earth, have super successful businesses, but I can tell you from meeting those guys a couple times and listening to them and reading about them, they have not spent any time at all in nature. They don't understand their relationship with nature and they don't understand how their businesses are connected to a healthy planet. Now they have healthy businesses, but I would say they're only healthy in the short term. And in the long term, they may very well be causing more problems than they are creating solutions because they don't understand that connection.

Simon Mainwaring:

Well, I think that's very true. And I think it's almost today's experiences of revelation that we've got to integrate sustainability or ESG into a business because it's integral to our business as if it's something new when it's so self-evident. You made the point there that the more time you spend in nature, the more you realize how fundamental it is to your business. So give us a couple of insights from your experiences in the natural world that you carry across to business. And just for those who don't know Rick, I want to give some context. Rick is one of the foremost climbers in the world. I mean, he was in the first American team to scale K2, considered the hardest mountain to climb in the world. I mean, even Rolling Stones said you are the real life Indiana Jones. So I don't know any better props than that and I just share that as context. It's not like you're going on the weekend and just climbing a local hill.

Simon Mainwaring:

So with those experiences behind you and with the peers that you had, share a couple of those hard one insights that you then sort of poured across to business.

Rick Ridgeway:

Sure. Well, let's take your example of K2. That was a hard climb. As you said, it was the first American ascent of K2. We did the first ascent of that mountain without bottled oxygen. It was only the third time K2, the second highest mountain on the planet had been climbed by anyone. And it was not just a difficult climb, but a very long climb. From the moment we arrived at base camp until finally four of us reached the top, we were above 18,000 feet for 68 days. And we were at the end without food and even hardly any fuel to melt snow to make water. We pushed it as far and as hard as we possibly could to still get back down alive. So I got back down alive. Here I am talking to you, and I was 28 years old when I reached the summit of K2. And what I discovered is that I brought home a new yard stick to my life at sea level.

Rick Ridgeway:

That whenever I reached an obstacle and I was unsure I could get over it or solve it, a problem, I could go back to K2 and say, wait a minute, you did that. You stuck with it. You learned what tenacity means on the very deepest level.

Simon Mainwaring:

You need a lower bar, Rick. You need a lower bar. That's a pretty high bar for any of us to aspire to, but yes.

Rick Ridgeway:

No, but my point is we can all through our own experiences discover our inner strengths and apply them to the problems and the challenges that we meet every day. Now, those are some of the things that I brought home from my life as a mountaineer and applied to my life as a business person, but they're very individual. Now you might ask what could apply to a business as an organization. And that might be equally, if not even more germane to our conversation with everyone listening this morning. And there I go back to what I said earlier, about understanding how all of our businesses are connected to a healthy planet. And that understanding that through our businesses, again, whether are its goods or services, we have a responsibility as business people to give back to support a healthy planet. I learned that deeply at

Patagonia because from the very beginning, Yvon Chouinard managed the company to give back through philanthropy to keep the planet earth healthy. And it still does that. It gives 1% of its sales, not profits.

Rick Ridgeway:

Good year, bad year, rain or shine, that money comes off the top, goes into a fund that then gets distributed as grants to groups saving our home planet, keeping it healthy, and not just environmentally, but for people in societies as well. And that's a responsibility that I think all businesses need to take on and I think all businesses could learn from Patagonia's example.

Simon Mainwaring:

And I think your point there is well taken, which is it's not just about sharing in the benefits of stakeholder capitalism, it's sharing in the responsibilities as well. And I don't think we've all as readily assumed the changes we've got to make, the responsibilities we have as we have all the benefits that we feel we're entitled to. And you talked about the arc of your life and the book as a series of stories that really lay out the journeys that you've been on, but look at the arc of the environmental movement since the seventies when you were involved until now. How would you characterize it? Is it getting better? Is business waking up? Are we just sort of obfuscating the issue even more? Is there cause for optimism? How would you sort of draw that line?

Rick Ridgeway:

Well, it is getting better, but the big question is, will it get better fast enough to prevent all of us from collectively going over the cliff? In a cliff I might say that is caused not just by climate change as a crisis, but by extinction. Those are the twin crises that we face. But I am seeing more people getting committed to solving those twin crises to really addressing them systemically so that I am optimistic. And I think that business has a responsibility and a role in solving those two crises that's perhaps bigger than any other part of our collective societies, because governments are showing us that they're they doing it fast enough. We've seen that time and time again. We saw it again after COP26. And also civil societies don't have necessarily the power and influence to do it, but business does. And it is a responsibility of all of us in business to use our businesses as agents for solving the twin crises of climate and extinction.

Rick Ridgeway:

And I might add, those commitments are creating business value for the companies that are making them and that's why it's starting to scale. You no longer have to trade off those commitments for your bottom line because now your bottom line is supported by and even enhanced by those commitments.

Simon Mainwaring:

I love that [inaudible 00:16:37] I was about to ask about, which is looking through the other end of the telescope, which is the lens through which a lot of business looks at, which is bottom line, P&Ls, balance sheets and so on. Would you say the market forces are genuinely there now? And if they are, it's very easy to purpose wash, greenwash, manage the optics. What do companies need to keep in mind so they do it right for the right reason so it actually does work in their favor?

Rick Ridgeway:

Well, first let's ask, where does that business value come from? And it comes from several different areas. With public traded companies, one area it's coming from are from the fund managers who are creating stock value. They're starting to manage their portfolio with ESG screens and that's creating value. Banks are even beginning to give favorite loans to companies who have better ESG managements. Let's say you are in a business where you're managing the carbon intensity of your operations. And then you find yourself in a market that is imposing carbon taxes. Well, if you've been managing your business for reduction of carbon emissions, you're going to be at a competitive advantage against a company in your sector that's not doing that. And then finally, there's the value coming from the increased awareness of these issues by consumers and their commitment to voting with their wallets with the companies and the brands of those companies that are aligned with their personal values, which are increasingly aligned with solving these twin crises of the climate and the extinction crisis.

Rick Ridgeway:

So that's where the business value's coming from. Now, you asked, well, how do you go about doing it in a real way, instead of a greenwashing way? And I would say there's a couple of things there and the most important one of all is to go about it with transparency. And the definition at Patagonia of transparency is another place where other companies and business people can learn because at Patagonia, we define transparency as the willingness to speak openly and fully to not only what we're doing good, but when we discover we're doing harm to go public with that immediately. That's the operating principle of the company. It's in its actual articles of incorporation requiring the board to manage the company that way. And when you do that, when you discover that you're causing harm and you go public with it, as we did a few years ago at Patagonia when we discovered we actually had slave labor in our supply chain with six suppliers in Taiwan.

Rick Ridgeway:

Instead of trying to cover that up, the initial reaction of all the upper management in the company was, oh my God, we got to go public with this. We've got to engage our stakeholders. We've got to get a hold of the government in Taiwan. We've got to engage all the NGOs. We've got to issue a press release that we got slaves in our supply chain, the opposite of what most companies would as a response think of doing. But it really created so much loyalty and value with all of our stakeholders that it was not only solved the problem, but it built increased brand value for us. So transparency is essential.

Simon Mainwaring:

I couldn't agree more. And what it also allows a company to do is to maintain the control of the narrative of their brand because they're the one talking about areas they've got to grow in, as opposed to the media running off with a story and then you're being reactionary in trying to manage it. So if you volunteer what's good, but also what's bad as you've done with your Footprint Chronicles campaign and so on, you see, you see how you can sort of stay true to who you are even as you've got areas to improve. Yeah, please.

Rick Ridgeway:

Simon, you can do that, but actually it's much more important to do it in a way that encourages or incentivizes or attracts other people to talk about it for you. And then what they're going to talk about is how amazingly transparent you are. And when they do that, you're building a brand value that you can't possibly get from just talking about yourself.

Simon Mainwaring:

Right. Got it. No, absolutely true, and it is. There's a lot of credibility that comes from those outside voices, for sure. And I've always got in the back of my mind a solopreneur, a startup, a big company, a legacy brand that isn't Patagonia, that isn't privately held, that isn't Rick Ridgeway, that isn't Yvon Chouinard. If you are in a leader position in any capacity and you recognize that this is a moment in time on a personal and professional level to show up differently, where do you start to rally your organization around? What are one or two or three steps that someone could take where it's not inherent in the organization, but they want to make that change?

Rick Ridgeway:

Well, the first thing I think a business has to do, especially a start up is make the commitment to be more than just about themselves and to make the commitment to be more than just about making money and creating wealth for themselves and for their shareholders. But to use the common lexicon now, it has to be for their stakeholders. And then once they make that commitment, and it has to be real and meaningful, it has to be deep down and personal with the founders and the upper executives, with everybody in the company. Once that commitment's made, you need to ask yourself, what am I going to do about that commitment? What are the core values of my company that I can articulate in writing and share with everybody inside my organization so that we all know what those values are? Because once they're articulated, once they're shared by everybody, those are the foundations of any company's culture. And culture can be one of the most important component of a brand and the foundation for any company's success.

Rick Ridgeway:

So getting that down in writing, understanding what it is and making sure it's more than just about you and your shareholders, but you and your stakeholders, and at the highest level, the biggest stakeholder of all is our home planet earth and its health. And it has to ladder back up to that.

Simon Mainwaring:

I remember a few years ago, Rick, you may not recall this, I was on a phone call with you and I asked, "Where do you think the biggest opportunity for a competitive advantage for a company is today?" And you actually said its culture, how you treat your people. And to your point you just made, where do you win there? How do you do it? Is it who you higher in the first place? Is it institutionalizing those values? Is it training within? Is it celebrating the stories of employees? Because culture has never been more sort of fragile than it is right now during COVID, the great resignation. So give us some pointers on how to really coalesce a culture that builds the business in service of the bottom line, but also the planet.

Rick Ridgeway:

Well, let's go back to Patagonia. In 2012, Patagonia became the first B Corporation in the state of California. And it coincided with the California legislature passing a law that required any B Corp within two years to restate its articles of incorporation to reflect its B Corp values. I got the job of articulating Patagonia's core values and I had a team including a few lawyers to help me with it. And it turned out to be one of the more important exercises in the company's history is, as strong of a culture as Patagonia had, it really benefited enormously from synthesizing its culture into its core values. And here's what we came up with. Number one, we're committed to building the highest quality, most durable, long lasting products we can. Number two, we're committed to making those products causing no unnecessary harm to people or planet. Commitment number three, we are committed to giving back.

Rick Ridgeway:

We're committed to philanthropy. We're committed to giving 1% of our sales back to the health of the planet. Number four, we're committed to full transparency. We're committed to telling the world everything we're doing good and everything we're doing bad as soon as we discover it. Number five, we're committed to influencing other companies and other businesses from what we've learned. Number six, we're committed to our employees to make sure we do everything we can that they have healthy work, life balances, and most foundational, that commitment is centered around supporting their families through our onsite child development and childcare support. Forevermore, the company has to operate by those six values. If the company a hundred years from now faces an unforeseen transition event, those values can only be changed by a unanimous vote of the board of directors. Now that's as good as we can do to memorialize those values against unforeseen events. And we're hopeful, Yvon and Melinda Chouinard expect Patagonia to be here in full health around those values a hundred years from now.

Simon Mainwaring:

So powerful and so compelling to employees to see that, the priority you give to them. The other side of the coin is your external stakeholders, your customers, your partners. And one of the things that Patagonia did so well so ahead of the sort of larger business movement is to leverage the power of collaborative leadership, which Lead With We is all about, and you did this with a sustainable power coalition where unlikely partners at the time like Patagonia and Walmart came together and you've got this industry-wide Higg Index in terms of holding yourself accountable. I want to know, what inspired you to seek the collaboration across industry all those years ago? And then what was that first conversation with the CEO of Walmart like about working together to something that really required everyone in the industry to level up their game?

Rick Ridgeway:

Well, it was a bit of an accident. Patagonia had been in partnership with its trade organization, the Outdoor Industry Alliance for several years developing a tool that would measure the environmental impact of the companies in the trade organizations through their entire value chain. And I had been helping with that work. And then I had also been invited to help Walmart with some of its sustainability goals, especially around perhaps scaling its use of organic cotton. And when that was done, I was in a meeting with some of their senior executives and they thanked us for all the help we'd given them. They were on a better path. And then they said, "Is there anything else we could do?" And out of nowhere, it popped into my head to say, "Well, what if you partnered with us to in turn invite other companies in apparel and footwear to come in and develop a really robust measurement tool to measure both the

environmental and social justice footprints of our companies through the entire value chain and to use that measurement tool to manage our impact."

Rick Ridgeway:

And they said, "Oh, that's a cool idea." I didn't tell them we already had a tool in partial development. They quickly discovered that and said, "We ought to build on existing efforts." And I said, "Oh really? That's a great idea."

Simon Mainwaring:

It's always that comment just as you're walking out the door that wins the day. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

Rick Ridgeway:

And they joined us and now we have the biggest trade organization in apparel and footwear on planet earth. We've spun off the software. We've developed into a for profit company that's scaling very quickly. It only started two years ago. It's already got over a hundred employees. And now we're at a turning point in the whole effort that I predict we're going to be able to meet successfully where we're going to take the tools we've developed, the Higg set of impact measurement tools that have scaled within apparel and footwear to the point where half of all the global production for apparel and footwear are using these tools now, half of global production. And we're going to scale that to other categories of consumer goods. And I'm pretty confident the Higg will be the universal global standard for measuring environmental and social impact of the manufacturer of consumer goods on planet earth.

Rick Ridgeway:

And then through that measurement, globally we can manage the production of consumer goods so that year over year, we can show through very accurate measurement with validated data that's fully transparent how all the companies in this room year over year are lowering their environmental impact and increasing the social justice of their operations. It's my dream, Simon, that maybe 10 years from now, this effort can hold up to the world a scorecard that shows that collectively all these companies making consumer goods have lowered their carbon emissions more than any single country on planet earth. That's my dream and we can get there.

Simon Mainwaring:

Oh, I know. I see the movement building momentum and it's a self-fulfilling prophecy. And I want to speak to something that is inherent in the word consumers, that is implicit in this whole dialogue around business as a force for good, which is a redefinition of growth, because it almost seems like business at large globally was acting on the presumption that we had a planet of infinite resources for decades. And now that this is a realization that you've learned more so than others, that we have finite resources on the planet. So what does this imply? And I know that Patagonia has leaned into the idea of responsible consumption and the responsible economy. Does it mean we've got to grow less? Does it mean we've got to grow in new ways? Does it mean we've got to value things differently? What's that trade off between building a business and serving the planet?

Rick Ridgeway:

You said you like stories. Here's one.

Simon Mainwaring: All right.

Rick Ridgeway:

I live in Ojai, California, near Santa Barbara. Yesterday I'm driving down the street to go on an errand and I see a pickup coming my way and it's got really weird looking headlights. They're like elongated vertical ovals. I had never seen that before. And I go, ah, what's that? It gets closer, it doesn't have a grill. And I went, God, it's an electric pickup. And then it passed me. I looked in the rear view mirror, it was a Rivian, the first one I've seen. And it was enormous. The thing was giant. It looked just like the other pickups, the F-150s and stuff it's meant to replace. And then I read recently in that article some of you listening in may have encountered in The New Yorker just last week, I think it was by John Seabrook, about out in Rivian and the electrification of cars at large. And in that article, John pointed out that these new big pickups by weight are about the same as World War II's Sherman tanks.

Rick Ridgeway:

And that if you really go through the life cycle analysis of buying and using one of these trucks and you sell your F-150, well, you've got to drive your new Rivian for two or three years just to offset the footprint of what a fossil fuel vehicle, comparable vehicle would be. Now, the keyword here is comparable, because there are these monstrosities and nobody needs a truck like that to go to the store to get groceries. Now you might need it if you got a big farm and you got to fill up the back with compost

and that sort of thing, but let's get real. We human beings need to do something about our growth and consumption because it's not just about too many people on planet earth. The real driver of the two twin crises of climate and extinction is too many people using too much stuff. So consumption is actually the key and root cause of those two twin crises and we have to address it.

Rick Ridgeway:

We have to get over this value that we all seem to have that's only good when it's bigger and better year over year over year. We've got to reverse that.

Simon Mainwaring:

Have you seen a different model out there? I mean, your contact in vast regions around the world, indigenous peoples and so on. Is there another idea about the symbiotic relationship with the natural world and growth in that context that you might point us to?

Rick Ridgeway:

Well, sure. If you look at indigenous cultures all over the world, you quickly realize that there is a decoupling between stuff and happiness. I remember being in the Amazon with the Yanomami tribe and I was going into a section of the jungle where no outside Explorer had really been. In fact, it was so remote there was no human beings living in this jungle. And I pulled in my canoe into this Yanomami village that had only been discovered by anthropologists in the previous 10 years. And all the natives kind of ran down to the shore. They had their bows and arrows. They were really suspicious and we were in kind of potential danger, but we had a guy with us who knew how to speak their language and he explained what we were doing and that disarmed them so they lowered their bows and arrows. And then I, through the translator said, we need another couple guys to come with us to help us carry loads through the jungle.

Rick Ridgeway:

And the headman pointed to this guy and he said, "Oh, this guy here can go with you and this guy over here." And I looked at these two guys and they were naked and all they had in their hands was their bows and arrows. I mean, I swear. I'm not exaggerating. They had a tiny loin cloth and they had their

bows and arrows. And I said to the chief, well, tell them to go back to their hut and get their stuff because we're going to be gone for about a month. And he looked at me with this puzzle on his face and he said, "They have their stuff. They don't need to go back to their huts."

Simon Mainwaring:

So you and me in a loin cloth, that's it. It's all we need, Rick. I've got the visual. Yeah.

Rick Ridgeway:

We can do it. Now, I'm not saying any of us go back and live in the caves at all. We're saying that we need to live our lives with a different relationship with the stuff that we surround our lives with. Now remember that that up perhaps that famous ad that Patagonia ran that I was involved with back when I was at the company we ran on Black Friday, the launch of the biggest selling season of the year in The New York Times a full page ad of our best selling jacket and above it, that bold headline, don't buy this jacket. And we put that in there because we wanted to shock people to read the copy because in the copy we said, no matter how hard we've strived to make this jacket with the lowest impact possible on people and planet, well, guess what? It still left behind two thirds of its weight in waste. It still emitted 20 pounds of CO2 gas. It still used 80 gallons of water.

Rick Ridgeway:

We had all the statistics there of its impact no matter how hard we tried to reduce that impact. And the message was that if you don't need a new jacket, don't buy another jacket. Continue to use the one you've got. Remember I said Patagonia's core value number one was building the most durable, the longest lasting, the highest quality product it can. Well that's because that product will last the longest, it will service you for 15 and 20 years. And because it does that, you don't need to buy another jacket. Now that is the [inaudible 00:36:28]. We're not saying you don't need a jacket. We're not saying you got to go out and kill a buffalo and make a coat out of it to live in your cave, but we are thing that you can be very comfortable in your life with that one jacket and you don't need a closet full of jackets that you very seldom use.

Simon Mainwaring:

Understood. Understood. And I want to speak to some of those programs that you've created to make those possible in a moment. But you talk about the urgency, the existential crisis that we're facing and the climate crisis. And we are out of time, these timelines are contracting towards us, but it presents a

challenge to a lot of businesses as to how bold they need to be. And a lot of them feel uncomfortable being as activists, perhaps as Patagonia has been in the past where it's said vote the assholes out in labels in its clothing or stop hate for profit campaign or as you say, don't buy this jacket. So what would your guidance be as to how and when a brand shows up and to what degree they need to lean into a different tone of voice or be activist in nature so that they can serve their business as well as their values and the planet.

Rick Ridgeway:

I would say be bold, be brave. Be bold and be brave and be honest and consistent with your values. And that goes back to defining what your values are. You got to do that. That has to be the core of the culture of your organization. But your organization, if it's going to be an agent for change and for solutions to these twin climate and extinction crises that we've been talking about, that organization, your business has got to be bold. And the good news is you can be bold and you can still be successful. And even if you have a consumer pyramid as it were that is different than Patagonia's, which is at the upper tip and that company has the privilege of having customers completely aligned with its values, that you can still find alignment with your customers, around your commitments, and you can make your commitments bold and brave and you can still win loyalty from your customers because the customers are starting to change as well. And keep your eye on that. Everybody keep your eye on that because the shift's happening right now.

Simon Mainwaring:

It's happening very, very quickly. And to your point about being bold, but also backing up with walking your talk, you talked about more durable products, but can you tell us about some of the ways that a brand like Patagonia activates this? So like the Common Threads partnership, Worn Wear re-crafted. Just show, what does that look like in practical terms?

Rick Ridgeway:

Well, Worn Wear is Patagonia's initiative to partner with its customers to get the most use out of the products that the company makes and that they buy. So the company's committed to making those products with minimal impact on people and planet. Now, that is only half of that product's impact over its lifetime. The other half resides with the use and care that is at the customers who buy the products from Patagonia use, and that's where the ask to the customers to not buy more than one jacket comes in. But then once they do buy that jacket, then we develop this Worn Wear program so that we can service through that jacket's entire life cycle our customer's use of the jacket to get the most out of it. So if it's broken, they can bring it back to us. The company has the biggest repair center for apparel in North America, maybe the world, and we repair that jacket.

Rick Ridgeway:

Same in other markets. We've got repair centers everywhere we operate. We have mobile repair trucks that drive around and create repair events. If you're not using it anymore, it's still serviceable. Bring it back to us. We'll fix it up. We'll clean it with a no water technology that we have and we'll resell it to our customers. You can go into Worn Wear on patagonia.com and find a full marketplace of used repaired and restored Patagonia products at very reasonable prices. If it's truly worn out, bring it back to us. We'll use the best technology available to recycle it. Now that's a good example of a customer service program that any company can embrace and I would predict find value and connection with this customers.

Simon Mainwaring:

And any area that you'd like to lean into more moving forward that you still are kind of... What's your focus right now?

Rick Ridgeway:

Huh. My focus. Well, I said earlier that I devote half my time to conservation and sustainability nonprofits. I'm on six different boards now. One of them is a group called One Earth, which is just emerging as an NGO committed to climate change solutions. And we've raised a lot of money to fund dozens and dozens of scientists worldwide to figure out what we need to do with validated science to keep the planet at 1.5 degrees, and we're actually coming up with the solutions. And they fall into three main categories. One is scaling the conversion to renewable energy. That science has been totally validated. The second is keeping nature intact on half of planet earth. That we need to all collectively get behind the idea of using our businesses to support the idea that we have to let nature go about its business on half of our planet and we go about our business on the other half.

Rick Ridgeway:

Now what we've done at One Earth is look at that in a very detailed way with tools that we've developed that are getting increasingly refined eventually down to a square hectare with where on planet earth we need to leave nature intact and how we need to leave it intact and where we need to restore it to be intact, and where on planet earth human beings can go about their business to remain vibrant and healthy, and that work is nearing completion. And now we're tackling the third pillar, which is regenerative food and fiber production. How exciting. I mean, I feel like rather than obstacles that threaten our future, we should be excited because these are innovation opportunities and they're just escalating as we're all putting out attention and resources there. So it's actually this rebirth of business

that we're all experiencing. And I want to ask one final question, Rick. The book, Life Lived Wild, is just so fascinating for all the stories. And there was one quote that you mentioned, I think it was when Chris Chandler invited you onto the Everest expedition. And I think he mentioned you a quote by Thomas or you read a quote by Thomas Aquinas, trust the authority of your instincts. You mentioned that in the book. Having lived a life so wild and been so committed to the environment and so successful in business, what are your instincts right now? What do we need to do? Where should we go?

Rick Ridgeway:

Well, I think we've covered a many of the things that we as business people need to do. And I've used my instincts to understand what those commitments need to be, but those are instincts that have been honed in the wild world. And I mentioned earlier, I named two guys that I don't think have spent much of any time in nature and that's Bezos and Musk. And my message to them is to carve out some time and get out into the wild part of the world and spend time there without a bunch of fancy support systems and learn from nature and bring those lessons back to the way you run business, because then you're going to discover that long term, your business cannot stay healthy if you don't support the goals of a healthy planet and get over this fantasy of abandoning our planet and trying to go someplace else. That is the most wrongheaded, shortsighted, ill-informed idea I can imagine.

Rick Ridgeway:

If they're listening to this, I hope maybe this gets in front of those two guys. Let me tell you this, to Elon and Jeff, that we can easily turn our planet earth into Mars, but I'll tell you, there's no way we're ever going to turn Mars into earth.

Simon Mainwaring:

Powerfully said, Rick. And all I can say is thank you for your friendship, your guidance and your leadership, both in your personal life and your professional life at Patagonia and for everything you shared with us today. It was just such a pleasure to have you on Lead With We.

Rick Ridgeway:

My pleasure. Thanks so much, Simon.

Simon Mainwaring:

Thanks for joining us for another episode of Lead With We. To find out more about today's guest, Rick Ridgeway from Patagonia, see the description below. And if you enjoyed today's episode, give it a thumbs up and make sure you subscribe to this channel. Lead With We is produced by Goal 17 Media, and you can listen to all the episodes on Apple, Google or Spotify. And if you'd like to dive deeper into the world of purposeful business, check out my new book, Lead With We, that's now available on Amazon, Barnes & Noble and Google Books. See you on the next episode and until then, it's all lead with we.