

## CASE STUDY #1

# CFDA Sustainability: Lauren Croke

**As part of a four-part series, CFDA examined unique approaches to road-mapping sustainable priorities, strategies and action with consultant Lauren Croke, a mentor for the CFDA + Lexus Fashion\* Initiative and the author of the Sustainable Strategies Toolkit, and Teslin Doud interview Lauren for CFDA.com.**

## **Case 1: A large CFDA member apparel brand at the beginning stages of developing its sustainability strategy**

To set collective goals, leaders came from across the company to clearly articulate what each felt as the most important focus. After cooperative inquiry and priority of business operations, this apparel brand identified its environmental impact and waste reduction as the initial leverage point.

In review of its supply chain, this brand questioned themselves on the almost exclusive use of air shipments. Does the extra speed of transporting goods by plane bring a financial benefit that warrants the significant increase in carbon emissions, freight and labor costs? They discover that in many instances it does not. In response, the leaders of this brand set a goal to shift from air to sea shipments in support of their sustainability strategy while simultaneously reducing waste and saving costs.

To assess the feasibility of this goal, the brand presented their plan to the individuals whose work would directly be affected by the process shift. Design, manufacturing, production and planning teams were brought together to collectively identify the changes sea shipments would require, including impacts

on their suppliers and manufacturers. During this forum, the brand was clearly seen as a system, highlighting the interrelationships between people, processes, structures and communications.

Imagine a different scenario: isolated leaders of a large apparel brand decide to tackle their environmental impact and ways to reduce waste. The change in policy of shipments from air to sea is then communicated down to each team in their silo. Sales and Marketing have a last minute order to satisfy partners, retail, advertising or direct mail. The brand's factories then have to subcontract work in order to fulfill the short turnaround time. Now the brand is in the dark about how many hours factory employees worked, its working conditions and if they were paid fairly. Ultimately, the shipment still has to go by air because a sea shipment won't arrive in time to satisfy timelines. As a result of this top-down shift, costs have gone up across the board and the environmental goal to reduce carbon emissions can't be reached.

The apparel brand in our story however, realized the power of shared goals. Working together throughout the company, leaders, employees and their supply chain were able to agree on goals and targets that are collectively attainable. Now, they share a purpose, making the system of interrelationships a tool, instead of a barrier in the fulfillment of their sustainability strategy.

CASE STUDY #1 CONT'D

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## **The Company's Plans:**

- Surveying the company on what employees think about sustainability.
- They have worked closely with the people in the factories who produce their products and see value in sharing more about the factories and the people who work in them.
- Create workshops and learning opportunities to broaden awareness and bring a more thorough understanding of the product lifecycle companywide.
- Focus on environmental considerations for their workplaces.

## **Conclusion:**

By creating a shared awareness, you make sustainability accessible to all employees and partners, employees are engaged in setting the agenda and priorities, plans can be specific and contain enough detail to provide clarity so all are able to contribute, a shared social purpose creates meaning in the workplace and sustainability can then be embedded throughout company value chain.

## CASE STUDY #2

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**Case 2: A CFDA member streetwear brand shifting the perception of sustainability through collaboration.**

The designers of this streetwear label prioritize authenticity, bringing a new look to the landscape of sustainable fashion. Their evocative brand voice challenges the perception of sustainability as simple and neutral designs with the aim of sparking an inclusive and collaborative movement in fashion.

“This brand sees that they have a responsibility, a voice and a platform to support human rights and environmental issues important to them,” writes mentor and consultant Lauren Croke.

As just one piece of the larger fashion system, these designers are focusing their sustainability work on identifying their barriers in addition to the unique contributions they bring to the collective effort. They’re looking to co-create the future of fashion by learning from brands already paving the way and sharing their knowledge to help others join the conversation. These savvy designers are creating a framework for collaborations that will enable this collective learning in a pre-competitive design space.

“Articulating your strengths [and] passions as

well as limitations helps to focus and sharpen your brand values and purpose and extend them through your sustainability vision,” advises Croke.

The vision for this streetwear brand is sustainability as a movement and using business for good. These designers are pointing to collaboration as imperative to achieving their goal. With a strong foundation of sustainable values and an authentic voice, this brand is utilizing introspection as a means of growth. Instead of fearing their limitations and barriers they are opening them up as key leverage points for increased innovation through collaboration and co-creation.

## The Company's Plans:

- Use innovative experiences and products to shift the connotation of sustainability as dated and out of fashion
- Create a framework and design brief for collaboration and information sharing with brands from all points of the sustainability spectrum
- Make sustainability a movement

## Conclusion:

As a foundation for your sustainability vision, you must focus your brand values and articulate them authentically. Discovering your strengths and passions as well as acknowledging your weaknesses and challenges will highlight places for collaboration and pre-competitive sharing of information. With time spent sharpening your purpose and manifesto for the future, profound and meaningful change will come with ease and intention.

## CASE STUDY #3

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**Case 3: A well-established CFDA member brand deepens their awareness of material impacts and innovations.**

This sophisticated label has become known for the artisanal craftsmanship of their beautiful fabrics. This cornerstone of their brand has grown from a dedication to technique, innovation and integrity and is the priority from which they will begin their sustainability strategy.

“This brand has been interested in sustainability for a long while,” writes sustainable strategist Lauren Croke, “but they have found it challenging to sift through all its complexities and grasp it in a way where they felt grounded and informed on where exactly to focus.”

Their big picture goal is to ensure their entire supply chain is sustainable for people and planet in addition to profit. To begin this journey, they looked inward to their brand values and identity to pin point materials and fabrics as their avenue of focus that will propel them through the overwhelm of this challenge.

Faced with logistical hurdles like increased costs and high minimum order quantities, this brand sought out resources to increase their understanding of key impact areas that would

assist them in developing focused strategies. With water conservation and zero waste top of mind, this brand is now able to clearly articulate their goals and priorities when working directly with their mills and factories in order to develop new practices.

“By focusing on their values of innovation, technique and integrity, they will be able to create a frame for testing out innovations that can shift their core fabrics in the right direction while still maintaining the beauty, quality and authenticity of their designs,” explains Croke.

## The Company's Plans:

- Work directly with mills and factories to better understand the key impact areas of materials.
- Conserve water and reduce waste with material innovations.
- Shift core fabrics to sustainable alternatives (deadstock, upcycled/recycled and organic).

## Conclusion:

When integrating sustainable strategies, the big picture goals are often clear while the path to get there is not. Understanding the values of your brand can help you to articulate your priorities, bringing focus to your work. As you take the first of many steps you will develop a better view of the landscape, gathering information about impacts and innovations. With your foundation formed you can begin to make one small change at a time, allowing each step to roll into the next, leading you forward to your larger impact goals.

## CASE STUDY #4

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**Case 4: A CFDA member contemporary clothing and accessories brand embed sustainable values company-wide.**

As is the case with many companies, sustainability for this contemporary brand started as a daunting path with complex information that was difficult to navigate. The importance and priority for this work however, came straight from the top where the designer and executive team felt it imperative to integrate sustainable values throughout the company culture and business model.

After sharing information and learning more about impacts and innovations, the leaders of this brand determined their initial focus would address human rights and environmental impacts across design and development, fibers and materials, production, workplace and packaging. However, with still a long list of priorities, this brand decided to further simplify their strategies in order to determine a clear and focused direction, set measurable goals and begin to make change.

“They are passionate about people and see themselves as global citizens,” explains Sustainability Consultant, Lauren Croke. “Whichever path they start on first and foremost needs to include and engage their people and provide a greater awareness of

sustainability.”

With many areas to consider throughout this work, this brand is first setting the tone and foundation for change by demystifying sustainability and embedding it across business operations. This brand recognized that their greatest momentum would come from creating a culture of sustainability starting at the employee level. They plan to activate their people with opportunities developed to educate, engage and align the community to co-create commitments to sustainable strategies and values.

## The Company's Plans:

- Survey employees for their thoughts/ opinions about sustainability.
- Share stories about their factories and the people who make their product.
- Create companywide workshops and education opportunities for employees.
- Integrate environmental awareness into the workplace.

## Conclusion:

By cultivating shared awareness, you make sustainability accessible to all employees and partners throughout your workplace and supply chain. Employees become empowered to co-create the priorities and engage in the agenda. Through sharing of information and learning, plans for change can be outlined with details and clarity to enable contributions from across the company. With a community purpose and shared values, the workplace has meaning and sustainability can then be embedded throughout your company value chain.