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Day 25- Greener

Eco Hero Spotlight

Yvon Chouinard:

How to run a business while saving the planet

My eco hero is Yvon Chouinard, the founder of Patagonia. Many have heard of Patagonia and of it as the environmentally-friendly clothing company.



However, few know the backstory of the company and its founder. Chouinard is from California, where he and his family moved to Maine in 1947. He really loved climbing in his teenage years, and grew extremely fond of the sport. Chouinard decided he wanted to make his own climbing hardware so he and his friends could climb high and more difficult heights. His business became very successful, and it was soon known as Chouinard Equipment.

However, his true breakthrough came when on a climbing trip to Scotland in 1970, he bought a couple rugby shirts for him and his friends to wear while he

was climbing. He had no idea that this would turn into a fashion craze in the US, and the demand for outdoor apparel would increase exponentially. This is how Patagonia got started. Patagonia actually got off to a rough start, because around 1974, the company almost went bankrupt after selling a batch of defective shirts at a discount. However, the company was miraculously able to stay afloat and revenue skyrocketed soon enough. Since then, Patagonia has become incredibly popular and sales have grown.

The best part is that this company is known for its eco-friendly policies and healthy work environment. Chouinard has always been an environmentalist largely due to his exposure to nature and its beauties from a young age, and has placed them philosophy into his business as well.



There are actually too many examples of this environmentalism to explain all of them, but there are some that are very significant. For example, Patagonia first pledged to donate 10% of pre-tax profits to small groups working to save the environment, but then upped this pledge to 1% of sales if this amount was higher. This is a huge donation, considering that the company's sales reached \$750 million in 2015. Also, on Black Friday in 2011, Patagonia famously painted a full-page ad in The New York Times encouraging customers to not buy its products (ironic, I know!), and instead encourage customers to reuse and reduce its consumption that day. His company also offers



free repairs for its apparel, to keep resources being used for longer instead of the “fast fashion” mentality we have. Chouinard and his company has stuck to their original ideals of saving the planet

even in rough times. For instance, in the early 1990s, Patagonia hit a rough spot when they found out that the “natural” cotton that they had been using was actually damaging the environment. However, this setback did not stock Chouinard and instead he pledged to use 100% organic cotton from then on, and has kept that practice for decades now.

I was very much drawn to Yvan Chouinard and Patagonia in general This company really resonated with me because I found it fascinating and incredible how this company is able to do so well as a business while also being one of the most environmentally friendly and sustainable companies in the world. I think that many of us, myself included, hold the assumption that for a business to be successful, they cannot hold eco-friendly policies because that is not how these business models work. Yvan Chouinard has shown me that this is definitely not true. If Patagonia is able to succeed with this kind of business model, then they definitely should teach it forward, There is **no reason** why other companies should not be able to make this shift as well.

Sources:

1. <https://www.patagonia.com/company-history.html>
2. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yvon_Chouinard
3. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/angelaueung/2018/11/29/patagonias-billionaire-founder-to-give-away-the-millions-his-company-saved-thanks-to-tax-cuts/#433cc0f31d6f>
4. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/danielasirtori/2017/03/20/from-climber-to-billionaire-how-yvon-chouinard-built-patagonia-into-a-powerhouse-his-own-way/#551dce91275c>

My Questions for Yvon Chouinard:

1. How were you able to sustain a successful company while also being a leader in sustainability and protecting the environment?
2. Did you get any kind of negative feedback or pushback from others regarding the policies and ethics you were putting into your company's business models?

3. What is your advice for the next generation of young entrepreneurs and businessmen/women? How can they take the steps to running a successful business but also having regard and respect for the environment?

Although I could not find any contact (emails, social media, etc.) for Yvon Chouinard to share my appreciation, I decided the next best option would be to post on social media and tag Patagonia instead. Here's the post from Instagram:

