



Taking a Holistic Approach to Business Development

Overview

As companies expand their operations, the challenge is to remain diligent of supply chain activities across the world. Founded in 1984 with \$350 in startup money, the clothing company, EILEEN FISHER INC, has evolved into an international company with global operations. Sustainability remains a central focus of the company, as a 'B corporation' or benefit corporation EILEEN FISHER seeks to make a positive social and environmental impact as well as a profit. Meet Amy Hall who, for more than 23 years, has been with EILEEN FISHER and leads its commitment to social consciousness. Learn how Amy collaborates internally and externally to guide the company toward ever-increasing human, environmental, and economic sustainability.

Amy Hall, Director of Social Consciousness at EILEEN FISHER

Session Highlights

We make clothes that are light and natural.

We are a certified B corporation which means we have adopted a true mission to bring benefit to society. 40% employee owned. 16 retail stores in US, London and Canada.

When we became a B corporation, we decided to be a quadruple bottom line company to measure our impacts of our work on our own employees well-being and the people in our supply chain

Business dilemma – places without water/water scarcity. Becomes a massive business mandate. How are we going to survive if there's not enough water for producers, suppliers etc...

So we restructured. We created a cross-functional team in the company. The leader of our business operations team, design team etc. came together to create new goals. Worked to connect first tier with fourth tier (the agricultural level).

We began to recognise that once the clothing leaves our hands and reaches our customers, there's a whole new waste stream that we have to think about. We're buying more, keeping it less, and it's going to landfill. That's not sustainable.

We have been working on human rights in our factories for 15-17 already and very little had changed. Despite all the training and hand holding, wages were still low, conditions not great.

We decided that if we could get to a level where factories had a living wage, that would be a platform from which to improve.

What is it that we can do differently to enable our suppliers to do a better job?

We spoke about, every time we place an order for fabric...and when a department store comes and says they like it, we go back to the factory and ask it for more. Changes, edits etc.

We were making it difficult for them to reach these deadlines and they wouldn't say they couldn't do it because they didn't want to lose business.

Now we're just about 50% eco. Our goal is 100% but 20/20.

We needed to clean out our own closet because we'd accumulated a lot, as we receive a lot for a good price being workers from the company.

In 2009/2010, we decided to ask our customers to bring their clothes back. We renamed this effort fisher found, but now we have the beginnings of circular.

Customers can bring clothes back at 5 dollars a pop, 50 per cent is sellable. The other 50 per cent goes into two categories. Cut up and refashioned into new pieces. A branded label now called remade in the USA. The other half we're storing. Working with technology that will allow the fibre to be extracted, re-pulped and put back into fabric – we call that process regenerated.

We've discovered that we can make beautiful almost upholstery like material: so we're making cushions, wall coverings etc.

Up to this point we've earned about 10m dollars doing this kind business model.

Quotes:

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- In 2009/2010, we decided to ask our customers to bring their clothes back. We renamed this effort fisher found, but now we have the beginnings of circular.
- Customers can bring clothes back at 5 dollars a pop, 50 per cent is sellable. The other 50 per cent goes into two categories. Cut up and refashioned into new pieces.
- The best way to predict the future is to invent it.