

A Letter to my Fellow Fashion CEOs About Our Role in Protecting the Environment

By Patrice Louvet, CEO of Ralph Lauren

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Here at Ralph Lauren, we are committed to protecting the environment. When we say something, we mean it, and sticking to our promises is no different. Our commitment to the environment started long before it went out of fashion and will continue until it's back in style again (and beyond). We have a Global Citizenship and Sustainability Strategy that we are extremely proud of that encompasses our goals, including those that we have put in place with the aim of protecting the environment.

I'm focusing on environmental stewardship specifically because the environment is something that we are all responsible for and its state affects us all. While there has been a debate in the news and in politics about the validity of climate change, those of us with our finger on the pulse can see just how devastating these effects can be, and have already seen firsthand how they can impact us.

Now, you might be wondering: "What can I, the CEO of a fashion brand, do to protect the environment?" The answer, actually, is quite a lot. Those of us in leadership roles can champion sustainability throughout our organizations, doing our part to protect the environment from further harm.

At Ralph Lauren, we are working toward our sustainability goals. We have had a 33% reduction in absolute greenhouse gas emissions, a 26% reduction in total water use, and a 94% waste diversion from landfill and incineration to reuse, recycling, and donation last year alone, all of which is only the beginning. We aim to reduce our emissions and water use by 75% by the year 2030 and hope that we can encourage our fellow fashion houses to do the same.

By committing to protecting the environment, we are also committing to our customers and making a statement to the world about what we stand for. So many of the resources needed to make our beautiful clothes are sourced from the environment and, if we aren't careful, we could lose them.

I understand that standing up for what is right can seem daunting and might be met with some pushback, but we all know that fashion isn't about coloring inside the lines. Look to the future and consider your brand, your customers, and the citizens of our planet. If there are things we can do with the power we've been given, shouldn't we take it?

The fashion industry produces 92 million tons of textile waste a year, in addition to the chemical waste from dyeing and production, shipping and packaging waste, and greenhouse gas production. We also use significant amounts of resources like water and electricity (21 trillion gallons and one trillion kilowatt-hours to be precise). These numbers seem daunting, but if we all were to set sustainability goals for our brands, we can reduce them and have a more sustainable future.

Once you take that first step, we will all be on the path to saving the environment. Ralph Lauren would be happy to provide guidance, if need be, so please feel free to reach out should you need advice. We can work together, learn from each other, and set new trends (environmentally this time). Let's join forces and allow fashion to help the world move in the right direction.