Reining in the Bulls with Michael Marx
Interview with Todd Paglia of Stand.earth
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Name: Todd Paglia
Current Title: Executive Director
Current Organization: Stand.earth
Name of campaign: Too Dirty to Wear Campaign
Date(s) of campaign: 2017
Target companies/corporations: Levi Strauss & Company

Summary: The goal of the campaign was to pressure Levi's to be a fashion industry leader in protecting our climate by reducing pollution and transitioning to renewable energy in its entire supply chain. The ultimate goal was to force Asian countries to shift away from high carbon emission coal-fired power plants to clean energy alternatives.

00:05 Michael Marx:
All right. Todd Paglia, Executive Director of Stand.earth. Welcome.

00:12 Todd Paglia:
Thank you. Nice to be here.

00:13 MM:
So we're going to talk a little bit about Stand.earth's campaign against Levi Strauss Corporation, popularly known as Levi's. But before we do, could you give us just a brief introduction to Stand.earth and also its mission?

00:30 TP:
Sure. So, at Stand.earth, we're focused on making corporations and governments treat people as if our lives depend upon their actions, and they do. We really feel like we need to move companies to make commitments and to implement on climate change, forest conservation, transportation, environmental justice -- all sorts of things -- having an impact on climate and the environment, and to help us then push government to make those changes permanent and legally binding. We work on issues all around the world, heavily in North America, but also very active in South America, Europe, and beyond.

01:12 MM:
And you have offices both in the US and in Canada?

01:16 TP:
At this point we have offices in the US and Canada, and we have staff as far south as Ecuador and as far east from me as Ireland and the UK. We have tripled (our size) in the last four years,

and we'll have our first team member in Bangladesh working on the fashion sector in the next month.

01:38 MM:
Wow. Impressive. I think Fast Company Magazine just recognized Stand.earth. Is that right?

01:49 TP:
That's right. In April 2023 it was announced that we were recognized as one of the most innovative companies in the world. We were on the nonprofit segment of that list. And, in particular, our campaign on Safe Cities. Cities are the locus of about 70% of climate pollution. And that's increasing over time. And that's everything from transportation to buildings to power generation. And it was awesome, especially because if you look at the budgets of most of the nonprofits on their list, many of them are 10 or 20 or 30 times our size. So that was especially gratifying. We also won the Keeling Curve Prize for innovation in climate advocacy in 2023 as well.

02:41 MM:
Yeah. Well, congratulations. That's impressive, for sure. Well, let's go to the Levi campaign. What was the overall problem or the harm that the Levi's campaign was designed to address?

02:55 TP:
So we were taking a look at how to start to get a little bit of a handle on coal in Southeast Asia in particular, so that the overall emphasis was what are the big chunks of carbon emissions that we need to try to build power and leverage against – and coal in Southeast Asia is one of them. Our particular angle on that was to try to figure out is there a way to connect big brands to that problem, to bring their power, leverage, media, and financial persuasiveness to that problem.

03:30 TP:
We studied that for a number of years, as you know, and came up with an analysis that we felt like this is a sector that had to move and that it was capable of movement and that it was significant on a global scale. And, calculations range from 5% to 8%, the fashion sector is responsible for that amount of global emissions. So it's a big issue. Several years after we chose this focus, Boston Consulting and other big consulting houses also identified fashion as a sector that really needs to change. That was among the top eight sectors of the global economy, most capable of making that change happen in a timeframe that would get us on a Paris pathway. So this was an endorsement that we were on the right track.

04:19 TP:
Collaboration is always our preference but at the beginning of an initiative it is rare that a company wants to work with us. They need to see the downside of not working with us before real collaboration is possible. So our task was to find a company to approach and whether they said yes or no to tackling their climate pollution problem, they would be the kind of representative of the sector that would move others. The company has to be big enough to be meaningful if they change, they need to have a reputation that would, if they did the right

thing, carry weight among their peers, that if they were to make the right kind of commitment, that it would be significant as far as their manufacturing footprint. It can't be a tiny company. And in choosing the first company, you also really can't necessarily pick the worst company because it might be years and years and years before they could even think about making a commitment. And we know some of the biggest, worst companies, hardly even have an environmental department or any awareness of their total impact. So, it was quite a long process. We ended up with, I forget, it was 12 or 13 different criteria that we looked at in selecting Levi's, everything from geography of stores, offices, employees, to media profile, looked at the CEO and board and executive suite, the C-suite composition, analyzed their giving with Democrat or Republican politicians, capability of change, is it even possible for them to make this change in a scale that matters, can they persuade others to follow and move the whole sector? So, really extensive analysis. We ended up picking Levi's, which was a little bit hard in some ways because they were not doing much, but they were still seen as a leadership company on climate. That's how far behind the fashion sector was - a D+ company looks pretty good to a bunch of F- ones.

06:12 MM:
And it sounds like you didn't have to prepare a report, that Boston Consulting had actually quantified the impact, or at least of this industry?

06:21 TP:
Boston Consulting I believe was later. We helped commission a study by outside consultants that pegged the whole sector's share of global climate pollution at 8% which was higher than we thought. What we did next was dive in deep on Levi's impacts, and this is something we always do in our campaigns which we call as sort of like the foundational report. What is it that is so bad about this company? What are the impacts it's having? What are the things that it's done to try to fix those problems -- usually those are very small. And what is a pathway for them to actually make change? So we did that report which I think was called "Too Dirty to Wear." So that was kind of like the initial 'here's why Levi's,' and the bar on that report was a little higher than usual, in part because the fashion sector actually saw them as a leader. So we had to explain kind of to the peers that we would go to next, assuming we won the Levi's campaign and say, well, if they think Levi's is great, here's why we think Levi's is really behind the times.

07:30 MM:
Did you send a letter? Often times a campaign begins with a letter going to the CEO of the target company, kind of laying out the problem, running out the ask or the demands.

07:43 TP:
We always do that. We do not believe in surprise campaigns. From our perspective, collaboration is a lot quicker and more effective if a company's ready for it. Most of the companies in a new campaign, in a new sector, are not ready for it. But we always give companies three to six months of time where we're beating down their door, literally faxing them, calling them, emailing them, trying to get them to engage before the campaign starts.

That serves a couple of purposes. One, we don't like surprises. Two, if they're willing to collaborate, we want to collaborate. And three, even if they're not, before the campaign starts is a better time to start some level of relationship with the company. And that will be the relationship that has to weather the coming storm of the campaign. We have found that getting started early is a lot better than trying to develop a relationship in the midst of media hits and social media hits and protests in front of their stores. They see us as reasonable even if we disagree. And on a personal level we are not like other campaign groups that treat their targets like evil people - these folks are mostly stuck in a system and we believe in being hard on the issues and soft on the people.

08:47 MM:
Yeah. I've quoted you, more than once, on the quote: “soft on the people, hard on the issue.”

08:56 TP:
Exactly.

08:57 MM:
And what you're making me think is that first letter actually is the first time you set the tone for the campaign and the kind of basis for a relationship. It's more of an amiable cooperative kind of relationship.

09:15 TP:
Yeah, exactly. One thing just to kind of pop out to a metapoint, I think, which is important, at least for our approach, is that there is a lot of justified anger in our movement at companies and governments. But bringing that to the table with a company doesn't really serve a purpose. Almost 99.99% of the times you're dealing with people who have a job. They didn't make the company, they didn't make all the problems. They're unaware of how to get to the solutions. They're humans, like we are, struggling with imperfect information and organizations that they have to move. We can help them do that. And coming in there with understanding and some compassion and also firmness that your demands are your demands, is the way to do it in our opinion. And, to come in in any other fashion just makes the campaign less likely to succeed and puts your petty personal needs (to be outraged, angry, to condemn) above your mission. And implementation very likely to never happen if you start off with a really angry, sort of bitter approach to a company or a government. It's just not the way we do it because it's not effective.

10:32 MM:
Did they respond to the letter by setting up a meeting, shortly thereafter, to kind of get more of a sense of what was going on, tell you where they were at? Or did you have to just launch and then hope for the meeting later?

10:46 TP:
So this goes a couple of different ways. Sometimes we have really deep conversations with high level people at companies. And this tells us a little bit about the character of the company. With

Levi's, it was much more of like trying to chase them down, and getting somebody on the not exactly the high level. They were pretty defensive in talking about what Levi's had to do and what we thought Levi's needed to do to become a real leader. So it didn't actually start off at the right place. And in fact, partly because of that, because of the culture of Levi's and the fact that they wouldn't engage in the beginning, in fact, they never engaged, even to the point of the campaign winning. They never engaged.

11:36 MM:
They never engaged.

11:37 TP:
Nope. They have since, we have since been able to build some level of relationship. We continue to benchmark the entire industry. They get grades every year, whether they talk to us or not. And so they've decided now to begin talking to us, but even throughout the entire campaign, they would not engage. And that's a new thing in the last 10 years. In the previous, let's say 15 years or so, not one company refused to engage. In the last five, six years we've had several.

12:11 MM:
Sometimes there's companies out there like Burson Marsteller who come in when there's a campaign against a company, they'll advise the company on how to respond to the campaign. Do you think that there's some kind of a sense that "just don't engage, see if they go away." Or what's your sense of what or why they're doing this?

12:35 TP:
Usually it's because they got bad advice - bad advice to the company but really good advice for the consultant who gets a long term contract while the campaign escalates. So I'll tell you a story. Back in the days of the paper campaign, which we ran as you recall, many years ago, after looking at the office supply sector, helping transform a bunch of the biggest players in that sector, we began working on catalogs. At one point we sent out a letter to catalog companies that included Williams Sonoma. Williams Sonoma got advice from a Burtson Marsteller-type crisis communications firm. And they lined up basically along the lines of what Levi's did. The chief marketing officer at Williams Sonoma called me and he said, "Here's what my firm advised me to do. I don't think it's the best thing to do. Would you meet with me?" And I said, that's what we've been trying to do. And we actually worked out a win-win with Williams Sonoma. They shifted every bit of their paper. I mean, tens of millions of dollars to FSC, Forest Stewardship Council, certified; canceled endangered forest contracts. We're still in touch. That's what one of those companies that just said, I'm not gonna listen to the comms firm because they have their own self interest at play. I think Levi's actually did listen to them and that was a mistake.

13:54 MM:
Yeah. No, I think that's good advice though, to just be aware that there are the Hill +

Knowlton's, the Burson Marsteller's and others that, really they're making a living kind of coming in and billing big time clients, you know, on how to deal with these campaigns.

14:15 TP:
Look at the Williams Sonoma example. They spent no money with that firm. They got a lot of positive media, and they did a bunch of great work moving the logging industry and the paper industry, and moved tens of millions of dollars to FSC certified and recycled paper. That was a big plus for the world, and a big minus for the comms firm. And Williams-Sonoma rolled this change out with their employees who loved it - it was their most positive cause related internal initiative.

14:36 MM:
Back to Levi's. Did you bring in allies, recruit allies into it? If so, who were the allies and how were they organized? Because sometimes I know they're organized as a network, sometimes as a coalition, sometimes as an alliance.

14:53 TP:
This was much more grassroots oriented because there was no big existing constituency for the fashion sector on the issue of climate. This was much more of like people, students, people on campuses all around North America who had a Levi store near them and ended up joining us and getting involved in the campaign. That was more of the emphasis of the organizing, students and people who were interested in the climate effects of the clothes they wear. So, we ended up getting lots of media in fashion publications, which brought more and more people of that sort of inclination to the campaign.

15:43 MM:
So it was more of a grassroots campaign, it sounds like. Not really a shareholder dimension to the campaign?

15:51 TP:
No.

15:52 MM:
And so more of a field track, more of a digital track it sounds like.

16:00 TP:
A lot of digital, a lot of digital, and a lot of grassroots in part because Levi's is such a populist brand. They've been around forever and they attracted a lot of young folks, college kids into the campaign just by the name. I think there was also a little bit of a sense of betrayal, that's probably not too strong of a word, where a lot of people thought that they were like hip and down with climate change and a lot of things that their younger clientele believed in. And to find out that actually, and this was the story of the entire fashion sector, this was why we got engaged, their climate commitments at that point which they had press releases and social

media posts and got media on, applied to only their stores and their headquarters. And for Levi's, that meant that their climate commitments were going after 1% of their emissions.

17:01 MM:
Yeah.

17:02 TP:
Right.

17:04 MM:
(That's a) standard across many industries.

17:06 TP:
Yeah. And the fashion sector, before we entered that sector, every single commitment was stores and headquarters. And that's usually like maybe 10% of some companies at the very most. Mostly that means about five or less percent of their total impact. And that's what they're focused on. Yeah. So, our job when we approached this whole sector was to get them focused on the whole problem. And to make sure that they were looking at the factories, the transportation, everything that was involved in making clothes.

17:43 MM:
What were some of the tactics that you used? And I'd love to hear some of the highlights of the campaign, both good and bad.

17:54 TP:
Yeah. So this was also, in addition to them not engaging, this was a little bit of a different dynamic for the company which we were not totally prepared for. They have a headquarters in San Francisco. This is one of those things where you really have to check your assumptions. So our assumptions were, these are our people, right? They're in San Francisco. They're going to be progressive. They're going to be wondering why Levi's isn't doing the right thing. And so we began doing sort of mass demonstrations, leafleting, educating the employees for our campaigns.

18:32 TP:
Educating the employees is one of the most important tactics. We want to create dissension inside the company, and we want to empower the champions that have been trying to get companies to move more progressively. We want them to be empowered by our campaign to make those changes happen.

18:49 TP:
The difference with Levi's though is that the employees were just downright violent. When we started doing leafleting and protests, you know -- it's not like we were locking ourselves to the front door of HQ. It started relatively low level, aspirational but edgy, informational and they were so angry that we would ever criticize Levi's. It was astounding - like a cult. We had to train

up our people to de-escalate and to work on being able to handle just being yelled at and cursed at by the employees.

19:27 TP:
It was wild. And so we shifted the tone and it became much more aspirational. We did Valentine's Day things with little kids handing out flowers in front of Levi's and 150,000 people signing a petition for them to love the planet as much as we all love their jeans.

19:52 TP:
And it had to really transform in its messaging. So while we always use humor and always work in some element of aspiration, we kind of moved a little more in that direction for Levi's, just because the employees were really cult-like around their brand. And we also still had to do some hard hitting stuff for media attention. We actually ended up calculating how much pollution they produce annually and then mapping that to climate deaths and figuring out how many people die for Levi's jeans. And that was a report called “Too Deadly to Wear.” We started off with Too Dirty to Wear, then we did “Too Deadly to Wear” and that's actually where we included, and this is something we always do from beginning to end, is the solutions pathway. We show the company: Here's how to end the campaign and do the right thing. And what we were proposing is real leadership would be 40% reduction in all emissions in the whole supply chain by 2025.

21:00 MM:
Wow.

21:01 TP:
And that's the commitment that they adopted without ever having talked to us.

21:06 MM:
Wow.

21:07 TP:
Yeah. Pulled right from our report. So I think, you know, they were smart enough to know we couldn't keep the campaign going if they took our recommendation, but they still couldn't get themselves to engage.

21:24 MM:
That is unusual. Well, it seems unusual just based on previous experience in corporate campaigns. Usually there's some engagement, even if it is that they send out some lower level manager in sustainability to try to persuade you that they're really a good company.

21:42 TP:
Yeah. It was interesting. And we've little by little broken the ice but that's what it ended up being. And we really, throughout that campaign, danced between humor, aspirational requests,

and the occasional hard hitting news piece that was data-driven and research based that, you know, they just couldn't really ignore.

22:10 MM:
You reminded me of a campaign, one of my first campaigns, the Mitsubishi campaign, where it started with a lot of civil disobedience. In fact, it was pretty intense, but there was just a point where it felt like it wasn't moving in the direction (we wanted). And, there was a point where we got thousands of grade school kids around the country who had already been communicating with Rainforest Action Network and raising money by selling pencils, to send origami cranes to Japan and pictures of the rainforest.

22:48 MM:
They (the kids) sent them to us, and then we sent them to the CEO of Mitsubishi. And like I think your experience, it changed the tone of the campaign for Mitsubishi, and that was the first time they actually sent a negotiator to the United States. But I think the lesson is worth noting that sometimes we get into these campaigns, we need to change the tone and the tactics to really start to break through. Stand is one of the groups that really led the way in focusing on employees. And I know that's worked well in other campaigns for you.

23:28 TP:
Every campaign we've done in the last 15 years has had a primary focus on the employees for a bunch of reasons that I've already touched on. But another one that is really important is not only does it create dissension in the company, it creates distraction from focus on the job. Instead they're talking about us and it starts to occupying more and more of their mind. So we want that sort of 'why do we have to keep coming back to this?'

23:59 TP:
And eventually somebody wants it solved. Sometimes we're actually empowering somebody at the c-suite level that has wanted them to move more aggressively on environment, and then we're the way they get that solved. So we're always looking for those champions. And by creating dissension in the company, we have the opportunity for those sides to form. And then if the campaign is good enough and aggressive enough and generates enough media, usually the side that wants real change ends up being able to leverage us for to get what they want and end the campaign.

24:33 TP:
So it's never us alone. But we really take that to heart is that, ultimately pretty much any company can ignore us if they wanted, but we want to make it really, really hard for them to do that. And we always know there are champions inside, so how do we empower them?

24:52 MM:
How do you reach the employees? Because I know we've done this in other campaigns where we actually do a digital oriented campaign that geofences the headquarters. So that employees

are seeing it, everybody around the headquarters in that geographical area are seeing it, so their friends are seeing it. Et cetera. Plus being out front, I imagine is another way.

25:19 TP:
We do the full suite of digital tactics, digital advertising. There are companies out there that create lists of emails for employees. And so we buy every employee from the target companies and directly email them with information about the campaign: here's what your company can do to do the right thing, and here's what your company's currently doing. We also have done a lot of pirate radio, so any company that has a distinct headquarters where people drive to it, and a lot of companies still have that situation. We have Pirate Radio where we say, tune to 88.1 and find out what your company's doing and how it could make real change happen. And often it's a caribou or some fuzzy creature holding that sign up. And you see people pull into the employee lot and sit there and listen to our broadcast. They do. So, we know we're getting to them. I mean, we've done everything from that to talking brief cases that we leave in the company headquarters, that blare information about the campaign.

26:32 TP:
We also will, for big press hits, circulate those throughout the hometown city. Volunteers will end up distributing thousands of a particular news hit throughout the community. So now we're not just getting to employees, we're also getting to their neighbors.

26:53 MM:
You remind me that one of the things we used to do too, was get these really intense posters that we would wheat paste onto the bus stops where we knew the odds were, employees were headed to the target company. So they'd have to see it as they were waiting there catching the bus.

27:15 TP:
We've also bought those ads at key areas around headquarters, and we've also done billboards as well as truck billboards that can circle the headquarters for the whole day, especially during lunchtime, when they come to work, when they leave work. So, any way you could possibly think. We've done airplane banners over headquarters, over baseball games where there's a lot of employees that are going to be there. Anything you could possibly think of to get it to the employees. We've done it.

27:51 MM:
All right. So let's step back for a moment and kind of look, what are the aspects of the tactics, the strategy that you think actually convinced Levi's that they needed to meet the demands of the campaign? Was there a combination?

28:58 TP:
So how we eventually got to Levi's, my sense is that one, especially with the tone changes to the campaign and the approach, we were getting to employees so there was some questioning of the internal narrative at Levi's that was beginning to happen. Number two is we were

beginning to build a lot of social media momentum and mainstream media as well. We had our volunteers having parts of the campaign taking over their (Levi's?) Facebook page.

29:30 TP:
And then they would have to go through and delete all those comments, and we screen captured all the comments and then got media over them deleting parts of their Facebook page. We also were increasingly generating negative media for them more often. So, I think the fourth sort of leg of that table is that we started this thing called the "pants off dance off."

29:59 TP:
Basically in your campaigning, if you can figure out a way for college kids to get partially naked, you're going to have a lot of people participating in your campaign. So we had this thing where we were beginning to have volunteers go out and go to a Levi's, and basically the jeans were "too dirty to wear." And so they would do this pants off, dance off, which started generating media on that in New York City, in LA and other places where we'd try this tactic out.

30:30 TP:
And it was starting to catch on. And I think that they started seeing that this is going to turn into bad branding on a bigger scale from social media to the media, to the pants off, dance off. And they ended up at that point adopting our recommendations. But I think it was all of those things put together.

30:50 MM:
Okay. I would normally want to ask you about negotiations, but it's so interesting that no negotiations ever happened in this.

30:59 TP:
It was negotiation by press release and report.

31:04 MM:
Yeah. That's what it sounds like. It's like some real virtual negotiations.

31:11 TP:
It was, and I mean, that was partly why we felt like we had to be really clear and repetitive about the demand. Because there was the initial letter, there was a meeting with a lower level person, but then throughout the campaign we had to keep coming back to this is how you get out of this campaign, or this is how you show leadership. And so that was why if they wanted to find what's the thing that'll get rid of this, it was right there. The 40% reduction by 2025 was the clear key to ending this campaign.

31:55 MM:
Did Levi announce anything when they did meet the demands? Or was that up to you guys to pretty much announce the victory?

32:04 TP:
No, we announced it. I'd have to look back and see if they participated at all as far as responding to reporters' questions. But I don't even remember that bit. We've had companies where there was a long standoff -- 3M was one where there was a long standoff -- where they would not talk to us. And even in those cases, we ended up doing press conferences together because, at the end of it, they saw, all right, you're being reasonable.

32:37 TP:
This is how we get out of it. We actually had to do this anyway. How could Levi's have climate commitments that didn't apply to their factories? So in every other case, the companies eventually came around to like, you're right. And now you're saying you're going to thank us for doing the right thing? We'll participate in that press conference! Except for Levi's…

33:01 MM:
Well, and I would imagine another reason that you want that to happen too is because you're moving onto your next target in the industry. So you need them to kind of see that the lead company in the industry has made the commitment -- like it sets a new industry norm. Is that what you guys did? (Who) did you move on to the next?

33:24 TP:
Well, we actually ended up moving on to several different companies all at the same time. Because the word we got from the industry is that basically the dam had broken with Levi's. And so now we had science-based targets becoming a thing where companies are signing up all over the place to get a real science-based target that applied to their factories, their entire supply chain. And so every couple of weeks a new company would be signing up, and then it took them several months to develop those commitments. And then science-based targets would announce a new commitment. But it was Stand driving those companies into that process.

34:09 MM:
You're reminding me that one of the big accomplishments of corporate campaigns over the years has been to make large companies like Levi's, the Home Depot, which you were also involved in, take accountability for their suppliers, their supply chain. Because they used to just only count their offices, which is considered that scope one, scope two by the climate technicians, but ignore the supply chain, which is usually 90% of their emissions content anyway.

34:49 TP:
Exactly. And there was actually quite a battle over whether or not that would be part of a science-based target for the fashion sector. And the Levi's campaign, and you can imagine they're all lobbying to make sure that factories are not part of a science-based target, and so we ended up being able to create enough noise around Levi's and the loophole and just the juxtaposition between their total climate emissions and the 1% they took responsibility for. And

so that campaign played a real role in making the science-based target mandate all the factories as being part of it.

35:31 MM:
That's a huge breakthrough as industries start to become accountable for their supply chain.

35:40 TP:
Totally.

35:40 MM:
And, particularly because their supply chain is off in Asia many times or in remote areas where the reason they're there is because they can get away with worker issues and with pollution issues that they can't get away with as easily in the US.

36:01 TP:
Exactly.

36:02 MM:
So, big lessons, positive lessons, negative lessons from this campaign that other campaigners could benefit from besides just what you've already described. Any big 10,000 foot takeaways?

36:21 TP:
I think that this campaign was, despite the sort of funny, unique way that Levi's approached this campaign, we ended up getting this right through a lot of analysis and thinking as far as is there a keystone company? And if we turn them, can we turn the industry? And so I think looking for those companies in a sector, and we're always looking at how do we start to tilt a whole sector?

36:54 TP:
And the way you start that campaign is really important. And for us, this one ended up working out pretty well because it was sort of revolutionary to go from bragging about your climate leadership when its ‘offices and headquarters’ to companies having to feel embarrassed about making commitments that are only headquarters and stores.

37:17 TP:
And so, like Levi's and that win, because they're not the biggest company in the world, but they're a legendary brand, and that they had to take responsibility, basically said to the whole sector, you too. So I think that beginning point -- really being thoughtful about, are you looking for the easy win? Because they were not that easy. There were companies that would've been easier, but it was worth putting in about 18 months moving them. It was worth every day of that because of the signal it sent through the sector. So I think that's one of the big lessons is, really think about what is the change you're trying to get to in five or 10 years, not just winning that first effort.

38:06 MM:
I think an important theory of change is what is the most effective way to create a ripple effect.

38:14 TP:
Exactly. The other thing, the lesson from this is, and this is something we try to do, but it's not easy, like Mike Tyson used to say, everybody has a fight plan until they get punched in the face. And, we started this campaign being pretty confident these people were going to agree with us, Levi's employees would agree with us. And in their heart of hearts, once they finally understood the campaign, I think they understood that they have to take responsibility for the factories.

38:46 TP:
But that first reaction was like, oh my God, they were really riled up. And, you always have to switch tactics. I just want to draw a distinction here. It's different. Like, we had clear evidence this was not going to accomplish our goal, which was to create division in the company, right? It was clear to us the reaction from the employees and like dozens and dozens of employees that this was not going to be an effective way to approach the campaign. We had to pivot, change our messaging, change everything and that's different from when you're in negotiations and the corporate representative is telling you "it's not working." Because they always tell you "it's not working" right? They always want you to stop the campaign. So we have an evidence-based approach. The evidence was clear, we changed the approach and that ended up helping get us to a win.

39:43 TP:
But I would just say like, if you're doing corporate campaigning, the company's going to lean on you to stop the campaign, to mute the campaign. We have never done it (stop the campaign) unless there's evidence for that de-escalation or that shift in tone. Be ready to do it, but you need the evidence that justifies it. So I think those are two of the top real lessons for us on this. I'd say the third really important piece is creativity. Being willing to be funny and being willing to be hard hitting, right? So it was ultimately, humor worked better with the employees, aspiration worked better with the employees, 'the pants off, dance off' was sort of ridiculous.

40:29 TP:
And it started to work with the grassroots folks and just being creative and open to things, even if you don't think they're going to work, sometimes it's worth experimenting. And that's what we set out to do when the first thing didn't work. We had to become more experimental and figure out what's the way in here.

40:47 MM:
One of the things I've always loved about these corporate campaigns is the creativity. It feels like in many ways we're creating this real world drama and we script it out, and then it's out in the world now, and we have to adapt and it's not always going the way the scripts intended for it to go.

41:09 TP:
If only we could write it all out at the beginning and have it work. But the fun part is actually adapting. For sure.

41:16 MM:
I want to end on a couple of questions. One is, how do you think that this campaign played a role in the evolution of Stand as an organization?

41:29 TP:
I think a really important step for us was, and we're now getting to that point, so it's been years since Levi's, but we've now gone from a corporate campaign that led to a shift in the aspiration of a whole sector, right? Now we're at the point, and that's taken several years, we now have benchmarked the companies and expanded -- each year it's harder to get a good grade. So now we're looking at not just the factories and their total emissions. We're looking at the materials they use.

42:06 TP:
So polyester and nylon are fossil fuel based fabrics. That's two thirds of what clothes are made out of. So now we're grading them on that. So we continue to expand what we're asking of the sector, and we're now moving into the phase, which I think is going to be really interesting of organizing them to be able to use their power to get solutions on the ground to lobby for renewable policies in Vietnam, in Bangladesh, in places where they want to keep working but where maybe the policy isn't quite right to allow renewables to ramp up fast enough. So there's a lot going to be a lot of work doing that in the next phase. And for Stand, it's now taken us from big regional campaigns to now working very proactively to shift a global sector that's responsible for somewhere between 5% and 8% of total emissions on the planet. So it's had a huge impact on the organization.

43:09 MM:
So one takeaway is that first there's the ripple effect through the industry on that issue. Then there's the expanded ripple effect on other related issues, and potentially unrelated issues.

43:25 TP:
I'll give you an example. We have several companies now--because this is actually a plus for them--they have other impacts like transportation, but they're not the transportation provider. So now we're organizing some of them to write to the Maersk's of the world, the Evergreens of the world, and say, we want carbon-free shipping and we're going to privilege shipping companies that will give us carbon-free shipping. Will you be that supplier? And so we're beginning to have them use their leverage for sectors that they use but they don't operate.

44:00 TP:
So it's a continuing to expand the possible impact of this campaign. And, you know, we're going to get probably this year another dozen companies to demand carbon-free shipping. So, it has more ripple effects than you might expect from the outset.

44:18 MM:
No, I think this is one of the first interviews I've really picked this up, where there's the ripple effect in terms of the specific issue. There's the ripple effect in terms of the expanding related issues within the industry. Then there's the ripple effect into the other interactive industries, eg delivery, transportation, et cetera. And then the other one that you refer to is there is the ripple effect onto the governments to actually help facilitate them being able to meet the demands and the commitments that they've made.

44:54 TP:
Well, if this next phase works, and we hope it does, we'll see. But if the next phase works, there's a really interesting, almost sort of poetic justice about this. This is an industry that has shopped the world for the most lax standards on climate pollution, water pollution, labor standards. And now what we're getting them to say is, we'll stay if you provide renewable energy. We'll stay if you change your policy to provide wind and solar more competitively than coal and gas. And I think that that also presents a bridge for all the folks working on labor and other issues to join in. Once you start to see them say we can accomplish our climate goals by staying in this country and moving the policy in that country, they're a little less mobile, less able to shop the world for the worst climate, environment and labor policies.

45:52 TP:
And I think at that point, we start to see labor and other things having the ability to influence them more as well. Because as they get really invested in making policy change happen, and then helping finance the wind and solar, which we're also going to get them to do, I think you then start looking at, alright, are they here to stay? And can they act more like good citizens in those jurisdictions than they have in the past as very temporary visitors? And that's a part that's really exciting to think about down the line.

46:25 MM:
It really is. You know, I was going to ask you the question just about how do you think this has influenced the evolution of corporate campaign strategy overall, but I think you partially answered that because one of the criticisms of corporate campaigns in the early days was that we didn't take the results far enough. We got results from a company or then we got it through the industry, but we really didn't take it as far as we could. And it sounds like, and I'm seeing evidence of much more now, corporate campaigns are taking it into the policy level with government, with other industries, et cetera.

47:00 TP:
The other thing that's going to end up coming forward in this campaign in the next year is that it is bridging in. And we're finding constituencies in these countries that have traditionally produced lots of textiles and apparel, is that the conversation is shifting to a ‘just’ transition. What does that all look like in a place that has depended on gas and coal and cheap labor? Is there a bigger umbrella for us to all to rally underneath? And I think there is, and, we're going to try to get there.

47:39 MM:
Good. Todd, we're going to wrap it up there. Thank you. I really appreciate it. I mean, you're the executive director of Stand, and Stand really is, in my mind, one of the one, two or three premier corporate campaign groups certainly in the United States, if not the world. So it's a real pleasure to talk about this one campaign. I have a feeling we'll be back to talk about others.

48:05 TP:
Sounds great. Happy to be here, and thanks for that. Really appreciate it. And we're trying to earn that every single day.

48:11 MM:
Thanks. All right, Todd. Take care.

Why they became involved in the movement

48:24 MM:
Why did you get involved in this movement and why did you stay involved?

49:06 TP:
Yeah. It's interesting. So, this is not your ordinary origin story. I think for me, it really started off, my dad was actually one of the few people who didn't drop out of high school but got kicked out. And he was like a pool shark and vacuum cleaner salesman, and did all sorts of crazy things and eventually straightened his life out and got a job at a utility company. And he was a meter reader, so he would go in your basement, read your meter and he then started somehow got a work ethic. He was always very bright, but then started climbing the corporate ladder. And so for us, every two years we moved two, three years. So through elementary, middle school, high school, I was in a school usually for two years, maybe three years but every place we went there was a forest.

50:05 TP:
And that was kind of like the foundational thing that no matter where we landed, there was a place to fish and hunt. And that really kind of got me into the idea of forests and the outdoors. And then I actually heard about the Sierra Club somehow in upstate New York. And then I ended up wanting to be a lawyer and those things, all three sort of things came together in me ending up doing this work. And it was really from, you know, growing up in upstate New York and moving all over the place and finding a home in the forest.

50:46 MM:
Good. Alright. That helps. Thanks. I appreciate it.