Fabienne Morgaut- Maisons du Monde (English version) :

Towards sustainable decoration and home furniture

ENGLISH VERSION

I've always been told "get your approach to sustainable development right, it has to be embodied right down to the point of sale, it has to be embodied right through to the employees".

BNP Paribas Personal Finance invites you to discover On The Way, the podcast that explores the paths of responsible consumption. Entrepreneurs, people from the world of business and researchers, On The Way gives a voice to those who, day after day, are helping to develop more sustainable consumption. Welcome, and I hope you enjoy listening!

Hello, I'm Fabienne Morgaut, I am the CSR Director of Maisons du Monde.

So, my journey started with communication studies. I had a strong appetite, a strong interest in nature and, in particular, great apes. This may sound strange, or a little bizarre, but it's true. I travelled a lot with my parents, as a kid, in extraordinary countries, before tourism really became big, in Indonesia and Costa Rica, and each time, I was fascinated by monkeys. And then I watched an extraordinary film that made a big impression on me, Gorillas in the Mist, about the life the murdered primatologist, Diane Fossey. When I finished formal education, after studying communication, I had an interview to work for a charity that deals with the relationships between foresters and producers, importers of wood, logs and sawn timber from the Congo Basin. I saw it as an opportunity to make my dream come true, to be able to travel in the forest. Well, it was far less aspirational than I thought because it was the other side of the forest, the production, development and concession side. And I was actually able to meet primatologists. That was the start of my FSC certification. I don't think I've been an environmentalist since I was born. In fact, it was about the journey, the animals. But I really became aware of environmental issues in 2007, when my daughter was born. It was then that I became really interested in environmental issues, whether it's bisphenol A in baby bottles or organic farming, I was determined to make my own purées and homemade compotes. This aspiration only grew because the more I read, the more I realised the problems are everywhere, whether it's waste, energy, pollution, production or consumption. And I aspired to become a sustainable development manager. But when this story began, I was in charge of communication at a charity that took care of the rain forest and had an opportunity to travel, to see the forest up close. It was a few years later that the Maisons du Monde recruitment agency came and found me, because they were looking for someone with experience in the forest and who had a background in communications. Without a little luck or chance being involved, I really don't think I would have found the perfect job for me, that could bring all this together. Partly because the founder of Maisons du Monde really didn't want his products to contribute to deforestation. What I liked about the meeting was that he said "So, I created Maisons du Monde. We make furniture and home décor products. My business model was not born out of a desire to be responsible. At the time, we didn't know. There you go. So, I created my business and it has grown. Now I have a solid enough foundation to ask myself these kinds

of questions, and I really want to take it on. Are you a leader in this approach, will you be able to persuade people?" So, he wanted an activist. It was really important for him. Hence my charity background. To carry out this kind of work, you need someone who is convinced and know how to convince. You need someone who's willing to roll up their sleeves, come back and explain what's at stake. It's true that when we look back ten years, it was like we had our pilgrim's staff, having to preach the good word, having to explain what was at stake. So I came back in 2010 as a sustainable development manager and found myself alone in the purchasing department because that's where the rubber really hits the road. We worked on supply chains and suppliers. As a welcome, I was given a catalogue, a huge catalogue, and I was told, "Look, you are sustainable development. I don't know why you're here, but apparently you do."

And I had a blank page, a roadmap to develop. I thought, "I don't even know where I start, how do you create a sustainable development strategy for a company.

Of course, there were some pioneering companies in retail at the time. Companies like Monoprix or Nature et Découvertes had done a few things, but it was still visionary to set up a sustainable development department in a retail business. So I took my little catalogue, flicked through, and then started looking at where most of the products were sourced from, where the suppliers were. And I went on factory tours. I went to Indonesia, China and India, and met the people. I set up traceability and certification systems that had to be convincing. We had to hold meetings to explain. We had to educate a lot. By nature, I'm a little impulsive, a little impatient. We were champing at the bit, and had to understand that if you wanted a responsible product, it would take much longer than three months to get it to store. First of all, you have to support your supplier in their transformation. You need to order it, you need time for it to arrive, you need time to explain it.

And that was the beginning of the process. We pulled out each challenge like a ball of yarn. First it was the issue of deforestation in relation to the products. So we started bringing out products, FSC-certified furniture and traced furniture. One of the first things I did was to work in India, where I was told, "Well, in India there isn't a certification system. You'll have to set up a project, from A to Z." So I worked on setting up an association, an NGO - non-governmental organisation - based in New Delhi, the aim of which was to go and visit factories and implement traceability among suppliers.

We also asked them to carry out a sourcing-identification programme for sheesham, which is a tree that provides a lovely wood, and which is used quite a lot in Maisons du Monde's collections.

So, working on the wood and dies was the beginning. And then, very soon, we started tackling other issues, like our carbon footprint. And from our carbon footprint, we realised what we could do to reduce our impact on the environment with our products. Let's see, let's think in terms of funnels. Which product do we sell most of? What is the highest volume? What are the most used raw materials? We started with sofas and thought, if we come up with a great idea to transform the sofa, we can really reduce the company's environmental impact. That's why we set up a research and development programme to find a substitute for virgin polyurethane foam, the foam used in sofa upholstery, in all sofas. And we found it. It took a long time. We had to carry out quality and resilience tests. So then we had a new sofa, an eco-

Classification : Internal

designed sofa. It has also received awards from the Ministry of Ecology and ADEME (French Environment and Energy Management Agency). We were very proud. It was known as the only real eco-designed sofa because at the time - and this drove me a little mad - everyone wanted to put forward environment-based pitches. But obviously you have to prove yourself. You need proof, criteria to meet, otherwise anyone claim that their product is responsible. But how do you prove it is? What certification is on it? What approach did you use? What are the figures? What's the maths? So, getting great support from a design office doing eco-design with life cycle assessment software, we calculated all the inputs. Where did the raw materials come from? How far were they from the factory? What was the production process? That gave us an environmental label, which was a real innovation in 2013, when we brought out the first eco-designed sofa. And then from there we thought we should make more eco-designed sofas. But it was difficult scaling-up in terms of volume. It's always been a little anecdotal in our collections, going this far in our approach; the composition of the products, the data. That was the main obstacle. And at the same time, you have to do a lot of work to educate customers, explaining what's in your product and why it's good. People have high expectations in other sectors. The things that we eat and drink, that's what customers prioritise, and what they put on their skin. It's the second priority in terms of health. But when you sell furniture and home decor, the main selection criteria are style and price. If it happens to be eco-designed or certified, that's a bonus. It's cool, but that's not going to be the deciding factor. So, there's a lot of educating to be done, and we've chosen to do this through our employees.

Before putting up any kind of poster, any kind of advertising campaign, it's about giving direction to the employee, telling them this is what we do. Do you believe in this approach? Do you want to be part of it? And that's how we set up the CSR representative programme in store, to have a trained ambassador, as well as their manager who is guided by an online platform. Every week, they have actions to complete, such as an ambassadorial action, or to let their team and customers know about the brand's commitment. And the following week, they have a behavioural action on sorting waste or finding a nearby charity to implement an action. They're very motivated and there's a real desire between them to take action at the point of sale. I have always been told that to take the right approach to sustainable development, it is not enough to put it down on paper, to have a written strategy. It has to be embodied right up to the point of sale. It has to be embodied right through to the employees. Otherwise, you've just created a CSR strategy. It may mean something to shareholders and investors. That's fine, but nobody lives it out. Yet today, however, there's a huge awareness and appetite for meaning among younger generations. And it's essential that you come and explain what you do, how you do it with all the obstacles, and the difficulties you encounter. The first comment I got from an employee in 2011 was "if you start advertising this, you're going to have to be perfect" and I half agree with that. Meaning, of course, we have to be incredibly sound with our arguments, to justify why we communicate and what this product is really about. But you need to explain the journey, and path to progress. Because we're a long way from perfection. It's been incredibly transformative to do better with our products. So we now take a much broader approach, beyond wood and furniture, to include home décor products, textile products, tableware, candles, fragrances and such. We're currently finalising our raison d'être to truly reconcile business and responsibility. In my opinion, I believe that the main challenge of responsible consumption is to make people desire it. There are neuroscience studies that show that if you make people feel guilty, if you don't provide a positive reason, the desire to act, you lose your consumer, you lose people because no one wants to be made

Classification : Internal

to feel guilty about the act of buying. And just as the Covid crisis has shown, when you're a non-essential, people say "we don't need this product." So, is there not an underlying guilt when people continue to buy for pleasure, to buy products that aren't essential?

I really believe this the great lesson that has sped up the approach to corporate responsibility, that is, Covid. You can see how it has strengthened weak signals, i.e. products that really meet new societal expectations. Local, meaning 'Made in France', recycling, swapping, repairing, DIY. Everything that has to do with the circular economy, swapping or proximity. This inevitably requires a company to adapt its products and services. And when we talk about responsible products, these are indeed the products of the future. How can we do it closer to home, sourcing more from Europe or France? How do we maintain our margin to be able to do so? In a context of scarcity in terms of certain raw materials and increasing costs, what natural resources do we use? Because the pressure is too great on some materials, even wood. Within the context of deforestation and climate change, certain species are no longer suitable for immediate production. So, we now have to accelerate in order to transform our product range. And at the same time, we need to keep educating our customers to let them know what we do. This is how we do things, and to encourage them to buy into this approach. And this is done by people, i.e. by the CSR representatives, by employees in the store. With sincerity and humility. Because businesses are not about sustainable development when they're created. That doesn't mean they can't become so. In fact, the real issue is how to be a mass-market business and responsible at the same time, how to work at scale and be responsible. This is a challenge that we have to take up with the management committee, with each of the managers.

Because the difference between now and ten years ago is that ten years ago you had to fight to convince people. Now, there's no need to convince them. Everyone knows what's at stake. What we're lacking, are the instructions. So I'm no longer the person wearing the sustainable-development label, the one behind everyone getting them into shape. I'm the person who encourages, who gives people the desire to act, who leads. But the onus is on the employees, the buyers, the stylists who design the products, the network of people selling the products, the sales team, and the maintenance teams. This work makes stores more energy-efficient and improves waste sorting, this is the kind of work that each of our people will do to contribute to being more responsible. And so, naturally, it's also in each of us, in everyone's behaviour, whether we are citizens, buyers or employees, to approach businesses and ask for greater responsibility and for us to be consistent in our approach.

That's what the future is all about, consistency. And, beyond risk-taking, to try to provide meaning and transform our jobs to meet these challenges. The challenges of climate change and business sustainability.

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