

9 Interface

Scaling Mount Sustainability

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, concerned citizens can change the world; indeed it is the only thing that ever has.”

Margaret Mead

Interface is the only company that has been recognized among the top companies on the GlobeScan-SustainAbility Leaders Survey in every year from the Survey’s inception through 2017. This is a remarkable example of comprehensive (what Interface calls “holistic”) leadership through two decades and three eras of corporate sustainability leadership. As such, we wanted to explore Interface’s journey through the voices of the company’s leaders.¹

Our interviews with Interface were unique in that we spoke at length with the Chairman, Dan Hendrix, and the company’s Chief Sustainability Officer, Erin Meezan, together in both the summer and autumn of 2017. We quote them extensively in this chapter to bring the Interface approach to life. In this manner, we hope to share the way the company sees the world and how it has anticipated and responded to the challenges and opportunities that come with going *All In* for sustainability.

Like Unilever, the secret to Interface’s success has a great deal to do with its ability to drive world-class performance in each of our five leadership attributes – Purpose, Plan, Culture, Collaboration, and Advocacy. Further, it is the blending and reinforcing of its approach and actions in these five areas that have led stakeholders to view the company as a leader for over two decades. (Please see Figure 9.1 for an overview of how stakeholders define Interface’s leadership.)

Interface’s Purpose, expressed so passionately by the company’s founder, Ray Anderson, allowed the company to devise a Plan of great ambition. The Culture of the company encouraged sustainability engagement and innovation and has been reinforced through transparency. The Interface Culture is also one that celebrates risk; Hendrix commented that embracing internal ideas, even before being able to prove their ROI, has been essential to building and maintaining widespread internal support. Collaboration and Advocacy have been hallmarks of the Interface approach and play an increasing role today

environmental performance. At the heart of these inquiries was the fact that carpets at that time were almost all petroleum based and manufactured with a “take-make-use-dispose” approach, which meant significant environmental impacts.

Hendrix explained the lead-up to Anderson’s transformation:

Take yourself back to 1994 at Interface. We’d just come off the biggest recession that Interface had faced, which wreaked havoc within the company from 1991 to 1994. We had made a lot of acquisitions. We had eighty-five hundred employees and we had a lot of different businesses. The architect and design community were really talking about “What are we going to do about the environment?” Ray came into my office one day frustrated, and, if you knew Ray, when he got frustrated, he got red-faced. He said, “Dan when we are talking about the environment, isn’t it just complying with law, there is nothing else to it?” He sat down and had a conversation with me asking if I knew anything else we should be doing around the environment. I’m a CFO and I’m like, “Hell no, we’re not spending another dime on this.”³

Customers, however, continued to ask about Interface’s environmental impacts. Because of this, and due to his innate customer focus, Anderson brought a group of internal people together to come up with a company manifesto on the environment. The team asked Anderson to give a kick-off speech about his vision – and he realized that he didn’t have one. That’s when Anderson began to study sustainability.

Hendrix told us:

Ray was an engineer by education and so he had to have a formula, a roadmap of where he was trying to go and what he was trying to do. So he started reaching out to all these experts . . . we eventually called them the Dream Team, people like Paul Hawken, John Picard, Amory Lovins, Bill Browning and Janine Benyus. Ray was just asking questions and meeting with them, saying “Would you meet with me and talk about sustainability?” Ray was trying to formulate the business case for sustainability – one that he could get the company galvanized around. He spent a lot of time doing that and trying to figure that out.

Here is how Ray Anderson himself described this journey in 2004:

For 21 years, I never gave a thought to what we were taking from the earth or doing to the earth in the making of our products. And then in the summer of 1994, we began to hear questions from our customers we had never heard before: “What’s your company doing for the environment?” And we didn’t have answers. The real answer was, “not very much.”

And at sort of the propitious moment, this book landed on my desk. It was Paul Hawken's book, *The Ecology of Commerce*. And I began to read it, really desperate for inspiration, and very quickly into that book I found the phrase "the death of birth." It was E.O. Wilson's expression for species extinction, "the death of birth," and it was a point of a spear into my chest, and I read on, and the spear went deeper, and it became an epiphanal experience, a total change of mindset for myself and a change of paradigm.

... One day early in this journey, it dawned on me that the way I'd been running Interface is the way of the plunderer. Plundering something that's not mine, something that belongs to every creature on earth, and I said to myself "My goodness, the day must come when this is illegal, when plundering is not allowed." I mean, it must come. So, I said to myself "My goodness, some day people like me will end up in jail."

And when I think of what could be, I visualize an organization of people committed to a purpose and the purpose is doing no harm. I see a company that has severed the umbilical cord to earth for its raw materials. Taking raw materials that have already been extracted and using them over and over again. Driving that process with renewable energy. It is our plan, it remains our plan, to climb Mount Sustainability. That mountain is higher than Everest, infinitely higher than Everest, far more difficult to scale.⁴

Purpose then and now

Ray Anderson's spear through the chest marked the beginning of Interface's commitment to sustainable business. It led to a clear articulation of the company's Purpose: *Be the first company that, by its deeds, shows the entire world what sustainability is in all its dimensions: people, process, product, place and profits – and in doing so, become restorative through the power of influence.*⁵

Interface's Purpose was (especially when crafted) and remains remarkable for its comprehensive and holistic quality. The Purpose captures the essential elements of leadership from all three eras of corporate sustainability leadership from 1997–present identified in this book and foreshadows the coming Regenerative Era we predict, especially with the phrase "become restorative through the power of influence." This powerfully emphasizes the importance of Advocacy to drive systemic change and the impact that moving from a harm reduction to a regenerative approach could have.

A fundamental turning point for the company came at a global sales team meeting in 1997. Anderson was able to find a way to rally the full team and share his vision that being sustainable made good business sense too. Dan Hendrix explained:

Ray didn't just recruit our leadership team around his vision, he was able to energize 8,000 people at our company to buy in. One mind at a

time, he used to say, as one by one we had our own epiphanies. We all believed we could really change the world if we could do this. And the capitalist in Ray was still in there, because he always ended his pitch by saying, “And you know what else? We are going to sell a hell of a lot of carpet tile if we do this.” It’s a better business model and one that will be hard for our competitors to follow. And so you got a lot of people, including the CFO, who rallied around this as the right thing to do. If you talk about what was the transformation point, the pivot point that really launched Interface on its sustainability journey, it was that sales meeting where people said, “You know what, we are getting on board.”⁶

But the journey ahead was challenging. Hendrix shared with us an anecdote about how the company’s Purpose helped drive decisions internally, even when it went against short-term financial realities:

There was a point in the journey in 2002 when we were really struggling financially. The economy was in recession. I was the CEO, we were spending millions more on sustainability than our competitors, and we were in the huge downturn after the dotcom bust. I was sitting in a meeting and we’re debating a new technology, Cool Blue, which would be our takeback and recycling system. It was a fifteen-million-dollar investment. We were having a debate in the room: David Oakey was our head of design, still is today. John Wells ran our biggest business, the Americas business. I had pushed the initiative back about three times. First of all, I didn’t think it could work, and second of all, we didn’t have the money. That is when John Wells said to me, “You realize you got our people more energized around this idea than they have been about anything before. They are all getting creative and thinking outside of the box. If we turn down an innovative idea because it doesn’t have an ROI that makes sense right up front, they are going to quit caring, and they are going to quit trying. We are going to lose some of them and we are going to lose this whole momentum around sustainability. So are we going to walk this talk or not?” I am like, “Well, hell, if you made that speech I guess we’re going to walk the talk.”

And walking the talk matters, as Hendrix noted in saying “If you don’t have a higher purpose that includes the environment and society, you are not going to get or keep the best people.”⁷

What has made Interface such a strong leader in sustainability is its capacity to evolve over time. Climbing Mount Sustainability has been an ambitious North Star for the company for two decades. Just as the company began to see that it would meet its goals for 2020, it began to look for the next frontier. In today’s Purpose-Driven Era, it is fitting that Interface has updated its own Purpose. For 24 years, it stuck to Ray Anderson’s original North Star for the company, but in 2016 it began looking beyond its 2020 Mission Zero strategy and exploring what might be next. The company



Figure 9.2 Interface Strategic Purpose

asked what a revised Purpose might look like, one that would be true to Anderson’s vision, but also simpler and ready for future sustainability challenges. The result was a new Purpose that will take the company into the next decade: “Lead Industry to Love the World.”

With this new Purpose, Interface has a new mission. In 2016, the company launched its Climate Take Back mission, with a focus on running the business, and inspiring change across society, in a way that reverses global warming (see Figure 9.2 on how this aligns with the company’s strategy). Climate Take Back is optimistic because the company is “. . . convinced fundamental change needs to happen in our global response to climate change. We need to stop just thinking about how to limit the damage caused by climate change and start thinking about how to create a climate fit for life.”⁸

This Purpose will need a new Plan to deliver on its ambitions to take the climate back. Let us now go back to the beginning and see how Interface has aligned Purpose and Plan over time.

A Plan to climb “Mount Sustainability”

Interface operationalized its original Purpose with a Plan in 1995 when the company committed to a 25-year journey to the top of “Mount Sustainability,” Ray Anderson’s metaphor for creating a sustainable business.

In the early years of the journey, there were fits and starts in learning and the development of management tools and variability in terms of the degree to which different parts of the business embraced sustainability. Dan Hendrix told us this story outlining some of the early experience at Interface:

I was then CFO, and Ray asked me to develop zero waste standards, saying “We are not going to throw away anything – we are eliminating the idea of a waste allowance in manufacturing altogether.” He started

getting a lot of traction with the manufacturing folks – the shop floor was engaged in thinking outside the box about waste elimination, but sales and marketing and admin folks not so much. We measured our carbon footprint years before anyone really understood what a carbon footprint meant. We measured how much water and energy we were using, started talking about benign emissions. We started asking, how do we minimize our footprint? This was all new, so all of a sudden the company was getting a lot of visibility and a lot of energy. Then Ray got into recycling, and we got into all this dialogue around what today we call the circular economy. But it all started with eliminating waste, [and that] is the idea that became transformational in manufacturing.

Hendrix further noted that: “When Ray envisioned sustainability it was holistic. It wasn’t a hero product. It was: you transform your whole company.”⁹ Erin Meezan added that, “The plan has to be not just a vision but it has to be the business strategy to get there. How you’re going to make that work across your multi-stakeholder model and how you’re going to actually measure and frankly disclose progress.”¹⁰

Together with several external advisors, Interface worked through the question of “If Nature designed a company, what would it look like?” This became the basis for what Interface called the “seven fronts” of the climb to “Mount Sustainability,” each of which sought to have operations and business models emulate natural systems as much as possible:

- Front 1 – Eliminate Waste: Eliminate all forms of waste in every area of business.
- Front 2 – Benign Emissions: Eliminate toxic substances from products, vehicles and facilities.
- Front 3 – Renewable Energy: Operate facilities with 100% renewable energy.
- Front 4 – Close the Loop: Redesign processes and products to close the technical loop using recovered and bio-based materials.
- Front 5 – Resource Efficient Transportation: Transport people and products efficiently to eliminate waste and emissions.
- Front 6 – Sensitize Stakeholders: Create a culture that uses sustainability principles to improve the lives and livelihoods of all of our stakeholders – employees, partners, suppliers, customers, investors, and communities.
- Front 7 – Redesign Commerce: Create a new business model that demonstrates and supports the value of sustainability-based commerce.¹¹

Together, progress on these fronts would allow the company to convert from a traditional, linear, twentieth century business into a modern, circular, twenty-first century business. This conversion required significant redesign of

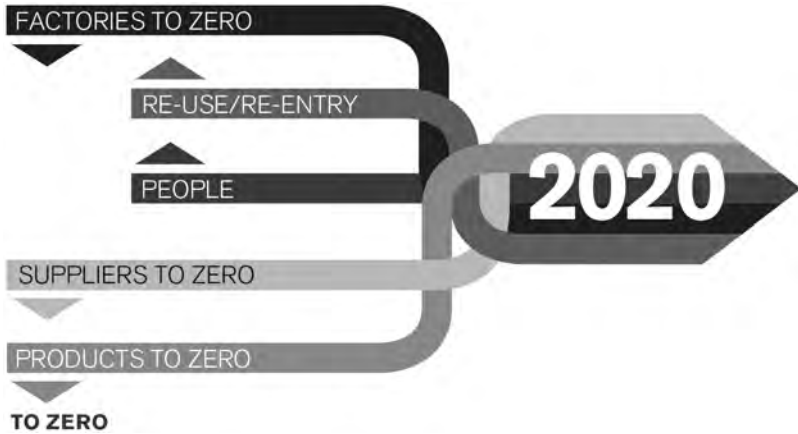


Figure 9.3 Interface Mission Zero Focus Areas

the industrial process and the products it produced, and for Interface to be driven by innovation and technology and fueled by renewable energy. (Please see Figure 9.3 for the key focus areas for Mission Zero.)

One of the most tangible outcomes of this transformation was a reinvention of the company's business model. The traditional approach to carpeting was to sell enough flooring to cover the entire room. As parts became worn, the entire carpet would be replaced – even those parts that were virtually untouched and remained pristine. This wasteful process was at the core of Interface's negative environmental impacts. The company turned this model on its head and created a service approach, whereby carpeting was broken down into tiles, allowing for replacement of only the parts that needed replacing (high traffic areas, etc.). Interface also began recycling used tiles back, literally putting them back into the manufacturing process to generate new carpet tiles. This innovation changed not only Interface but also the entire carpet industry.

Erin Meezan described her sense of why Interface's strategy has been so successful:

As a sustainability person coming into the business I think what is really interesting about Interface's approach, and why it has taken hold, and why it was as successful as it was in transforming the business, is that it started out really from a transformational place. It was led from the top by a really strong leader and it was not about incremental goals or how do we transform a little part of the business. It was fundamentally at its heart about how do we transform our business to be something different. So it acknowledged that we were going to create a new business framework and a model and it was going to be comprehensive.¹²

In 2004, when Interface named its sustainability strategy, “Mission Zero,” to convey its commitment to getting to zero environmental impact by 2020, Ray Anderson described the vision of Mission Zero this way:

If we’re successful, we’ll spend the rest of our days harvesting yesterday’s carpets and other petro-chemically derived products, and recycling them into new materials; and converting sunlight into energy; with zero scrap going to the landfill and zero emissions into the ecosystem. And we’ll be doing well . . . very well . . . by doing good.¹³

Interface’s commitment has not wavered despite Ray Anderson’s death in 2011, leadership changes, competition, and recessions. On the latter point, it has been argued that the savings the company made from its waste elimination strategy enabled them to survive economic downturns and prosper while competitors with shallower sustainability programs struggled.

As we approach 2020, Interface is close to achieving its Mission Zero goals. It has accomplished remarkable progress, reducing its impacts significantly across its operations. The company transparently reports on its progress annually. Figure 9.4 outlines its “Mission Progress” at the end of the year in 2017.

Mission Progress EOY 2017

ENERGY USE Less energy to make our products	43% ↓
RENEWABLE ENERGY More energy from renewable sources	88% ↑
GHG EMISSIONS Less emissions from our manufacturing sites	95% ↓
WASTE TO LANDFILL Less waste going to landfills	91% ↓
WATER INTAKE Less water used at our manufacturing sites	88% ↓
RECYCLED & BIOBASED MATERIALS More recycled and biobased materials used	61% ↑
PRODUCT CARBON FOOTPRINT Less carbon footprint in our products	60% ↓

Figure 9.4 Interface Sustainability Progress

The Plan that Interface put in place to transform itself into a zero-impact enterprise has been difficult to deliver, but rewarding for the company and a catalyst in the broader societal debate on the role and future of business. If a petro-chemical intense industrial company like Interface can achieve Mission Zero, and do it in a way that mobilizes its people, supply chain, and wider stakeholders, while delivering strong financial returns, why can't all companies?

Let us now turn to look at how Interface's Culture helped it scale Mount Sustainability.

A culture of sustainability

The drive of the entrepreneurial Culture that made the company the largest commercial carpet company in the world, along with a willingness to innovate while being transparent and engaging along the way has created a unique alchemy inside Interface that facilitates its success today.

As Dan Hendrix told us, feeding the Culture was a fundamental success factor in becoming a sustainability leader:

We really had a great culture going in 1994 when Ray had the epiphany, but it was more of a family culture . . . an entrepreneurial culture. Then Ray had the epiphany and later we had that sales meeting in 1997, where 1,200 of our people from around the world heard from Ray and his Dream Team for the first time. They were all in. Sustainability created a challenge within our culture to become more innovative; it challenged the culture to figure out how to create a roadmap when there wasn't a roadmap; and it empowered the heck out of them to actually get there. It reinforced how important this purpose and mission was around sustainability. We fed that culture by empowering and empowering and innovating . . . the innovation pipeline that came out of sustainability was what fueled the whole culture: "Hey we can do this, let's go." That was all driven from the top with Ray and then with me and now with Jay [Gould, the current CEO].¹⁴ Then you have people like Erin [Meezan, the current CSO] who are the purpose-driven zealots about how we get the sustainability out there, talking to our people and teaching our people, so I mean it came from the ground up and it came from the top down, and it came with innovation and empowerment.¹⁵

Culture was recognized as a fundamental component required to convert a "brown" industrial company to a "green" one. In fact, at one point, the company invited in a PhD student¹⁶ to study the company's Culture and how it was a factor in the transformation. Erin Meezan shared the key learning from this research:

It has been a really good roadmap for how we did it at Interface. A couple of the things that she pulled out were things like giving people

permission to engage. One of the things Interface did was have Ray and the other senior leaders in the business, like Dan and our business presidents, explicitly say to people: “We want your ideas, you have an opportunity to experiment, we expect you to engage in this.”

Second, by not presenting it as a finished strategy, but saying we have this broad mission, and it is ambitious enough that you can kind of make it your own, and so you can help us define that. As we’ve gone back and interviewed employees and said: “Why did you feel connected to this?” It is because it was broad enough in the beginning that they could help make it their own. You knew you could become a waste champion; you could be someone who was really interested in doing volunteering in your community, and there was a way for you to personalize this and to bring your own kind of take on sustainability that fit into our framework.

A third was consistency. I mean, you know, Ray had the vision, but Dan was actually the guy who funded all this stuff and who took the crazy risk to invest in a recycled backing line or a program that would bring back carpet from customers or a big renewable energy purchase. So that consistency, the teams consistently knowing that they would get things funded, and that Interface was behind this even when we had financial challenges, even when we really struggled with some of our core customer markets, that was huge. We consistently funded stuff. We never really took it off the table and I think that was a huge message to our people.

Finally, another thing that we did is even though the zero footprint vision is huge, we really broke it down into very specific bites. In the early days, we focused on something really tangible which was waste. We made that very real. I mean down to the level of teams in the local businesses scooping yarn up off the floor, pasting that ball of yarn onto a poster and saying to people: “this is not sustainable and by the way, this is \$75 worth of yarn or \$300 worth of yarn.” They really got focused on making it tangible and translatable at the factory associate level.¹⁷

Innovation has been a critical thread throughout Interface’s journey and has pushed the organization into different directions. One example is how it moved into the residential carpet business. FLOR, a carpet tile business for residential consumers, launched in 2005, brought to the public a sustainable residential carpet tile option. With sustainability at the product’s core, FLOR was a breakthrough product for residential consumers and a good example of the type of innovation that has become commonplace at Interface.

Going forward, the company remains committed to engaging its employees and cultivating the culture to foster more innovation and progress on its sustainability agenda. Part of this has to do with ongoing efforts to be transparent both inside and outside the organization. Measuring its impacts, progress on its goals, and overall performance has become a fixture of the

company's Culture. Dan Hendrix explains his thinking on the importance of transparency:

There is so much transparency out there today that companies really can't run and hide. We're really focused on the next generation of millennials and really do believe they will dedicate their careers to the people and the companies that are transparent, that are trying to do the right thing. They'll vote with their careers and they will vote their wallets.¹⁸

Erin Meezan told us that after Ray Anderson's passing Dan Hendrix asked her to:

figure out how we keep people connected and engaged in Mission Zero after Ray's death. What are the things we should do? We actually went around the world to our global factories and just asked people, what is it that we are doing well now to keep you connected to this? What makes you passionate about coming to Interface and working on sustainability? We identified in the European business that they had created a learning program that was three levels of sustainability learning. Once you completed those three levels you were allowed to be an Interface Sustainability Ambassador. That had a huge impact on really motivating people to stay connected; to learn what we were doing; to become an advocate for it not just externally but internally. One of the lessons we took from that is building out a program that will launch in 2018 that every associate of Interface will go through will be modeled on that [European] program.¹⁹

The corporate Culture at Interface has been molded to facilitate sustainable business progress, with deep roots, according to Dan Hendrix: "There is no turning back when it comes to our culture. It's part of our DNA."²⁰ That same culture has a huge influence on Collaboration and Advocacy, which are the aspects of Interface's efforts that we explore next.

Scaling together

Ray Anderson understood early on that he needed the knowledge and experience of others who had been thinking about sustainability for a long time. He sought out people like Amory Lovins,²¹ Paul Hawken,²² Janine Benyus,²³ and Jonathan Porritt,²⁴ and many others including the organization The Natural Step.²⁵ Interface now saw Collaboration as a critical part of its journey.

This early Collaboration around the science and potential solutions to sustainability challenges, and the openness to listening and allowing others to influence the direction of the company was near unprecedented. The "Dream Team" of advisors that Anderson pulled together agreed to support the effort because the invitation included the opportunity to influence Interface's strategic direction. Erin Meezan suggested that: "Some of the original reasons

why Paul Hawken and Amory Lovins and Janine Benyus engaged with us is because they had a vote in some of those early decisions about where we were going. They truly had the leverage to make some big decisions with us, and that to me goes beyond collaboration.”²⁶

Hendrix confirmed the centrality of Collaboration in Interface’s approach to its sustainability strategy: “Collaboration is at the heart of everything we have done – we couldn’t have done it without suppliers, vendor partners, customers, field experts and industry peers. We had to innovate our way, every step of the way.”²⁷

An example of how Interface collaborated with its supply chain to drive its sustainability performance forward related to its yarn suppliers. At one of its Supplier Summits, Interface shared with suppliers its business case for switching to sustainable raw materials and the vision the company had for a closed-loop system which would require recycled content for its carpets. When some of its main suppliers refused to innovate around recycled content, two lesser known manufacturers of yarn, Universal, and Aquafil, “got inspired by the vision and said: ‘We’ll follow Interface,’” says Hendrix.²⁸ Interface offered an incentive of secure and significant business if suppliers could innovate at the pace required. They did, and to this day they enjoy a substantial business relationship with Interface.

This mindset of Collaboration has also included engagement with investors. Hendrix told us of his recent engagements with Interface’s top institutional investors and the changes he is seeing in how they approach sustainability:

I talked to ten of our largest shareholders and I asked them, how does sustainability rank in terms of your investment decision? Nine of them said it is a risk factor filter and one of the key investment decisions today. It is not just about profits. They understand climate change is a business risk, and they believe that social inequity is a problem for business. So investors like companies like Interface because they understand that a social mission can drive innovation, goodwill in the marketplace and employee engagement. So I think the investors are on board now.²⁹

Interface is keen to engage the investment community further in future years, going beyond its own shareholders and working with other companies to challenge some assumptions around sustainability and financial performance. As Meezan explained: “I feel like there is a voice that some of the sustainable business community has around challenging the dominant narrative that sustainable companies don’t perform as well that we need to challenge collectively.”³⁰

Perhaps the most radical collaboration that Interface has engaged in is with nature itself. Early on, the company worked with Janine Benyus and her Biomimicry Institute. Biomimicry uses nature as an inspiration for human innovation. The thinking is based on the idea that, after billions of years of evolution, nature is replete with solutions to many of the world’s challenges.

Interface has applied biomimicry to its product design. One example is its Entropy collection which became the first in a new line of carpet tiles that use patterns found in nature to improve the aesthetics of flooring while also reducing waste. Another is its “factory as a forest” initiative through which Interface envisions future factories that provide the same ecosystem services – clean air and water, carbon sequestration, cycling nutrients, etc. – as a natural forest.

Advocating for the planet

The final sustainability leadership attribute, Advocacy, has also had an important role to play in Interface’s journey. Right from the beginning, Ray Anderson saw the importance of demonstrating to the wider world that reaching “Mount Sustainability” was possible and that by doing so it would give courage to others to follow.

After his 1994 epiphany, Anderson spoke wherever he could – conferences, colleges, TV, documentaries, etc. He was an indefatigable advocate for sustainability and told his personal and corporate story with great humility and passion. He inspired thousands of people across the world to think differently about business and how it could be an agent for positive change.³¹

Interface’s Chairman, Dan Hendrix, described Anderson’s belief that Interface could be influential well beyond its operations: “If you looked at all his workings and writings and speeches, Ray always believed in this restorative concept of Interface, and that by influencing a lot of people along the way, that this little carpet company could actually change the world.”³²

This belief persists today. There is a commitment to engage externally and build a case for sustainable business based on Interface’s experience. Dan Hendrix told us that:

One of the things that we did was our people got engaged with the outside world and became big advocates for sustainability. I think one reason that we get mentioned in the Leaders Survey is because we’re out there talking about sustainability and trying to convince other companies to get on this bandwagon and go. From day one we’ve had speaker bureaus, Erin is on planes all the time going out and speaking; Ray Anderson spoke a hundred times a year; I speak. We all feel like we need to pay it forward.³³

Today, as the company embarks on its Climate Take Back journey, it still has a great deal of work to do across the board when it comes to Advocacy. Erin Meezan acknowledged this firstly requires greater engagement with the financial community:

We need to be more active in the broader conversation in the investment community. Maybe the angle is not around whether we perform

better, but if we're much better positioned as the world finally wakes up to the reality of climate change or the reality of the deep challenges we face around sustainable development. These companies who've already internalized it and created a business model to not just deal with it but to actually benefit from it are much better positioned. We have failed to make that argument and I do think it is because a lot of the sustainable pioneers are family owned and they don't have to deal with the market. I think we've suffered by not making the case but we need to.³⁴

Meezan also feels that Interface needs to have more missionary zeal regarding its radical approach to climate change, saying it must be about:

trying to convince more companies and to really frame the conversation around shifting your corporate strategy from a low carbon strategy to a strategy that goes beyond that. Climate Take Back, if we are able to do that at Interface, we are quite aware that it will have a very small impact. But if we are able to build a roadmap and change a conversation and get a bunch of corporates who are ready to have this conversation about what a new corporate climate strategy looks like, if we can shift that and frame that much like we did with Mission Zero, I think we can have a really big impact on helping other companies advance.³⁵

Conclusion

Looking ahead to 2030, it will be fascinating to see how Interface develops not only with its new Climate Take Back as the Purpose-Driven Era continues, but also how it might lead the transition to the predicted Regenerative Era. Will it play a meaningful role in delivery of the Sustainable Development Goals? Will it be involved in addressing global inequality? How might Interface become more of a leader on Collaboration and Advocacy, attributes vital to achieve its stated objectives?

In many ways, Interface possesses leadership characteristics of the coming Regenerative Era already. Ray Anderson was a keen supporter of Industrial Ecology and drove his company to embrace a closed-loop business model, an early precursor to the circular economy business models being trialed by others today. The company's initial Purpose specifically referenced "becoming restorative" – a pioneering idea in the 1990s, and one that we believe will really take hold in the coming decade.

The environment and society both need regenerative business models to become the norm. Interface has been a champion for approaches to industry that align with nature for longer than almost any other business. The latest leg of its journey, Climate Take Back, will require regeneration or regenerative practices at scale. While the pathway to achieve this is unknown, Ray Anderson's legacy and the company's experience to date make it likely it will successfully go *All In* and achieve its Climate Take Back ambitions,

providing a regenerative business model for others to learn from along the way.

Notes

- 1 There is a more personal reason for our connection to Interface, as one of us (Chris) had the pleasure of meeting Ray Anderson on a few occasions and in one of those, he shared how much he valued the GlobeScan-SustainAbility Leaders Survey as a pure and simple approach to measuring progress for his company. Mark and Chris also led the Regeneration Roadmap project in the lead-up to Rio+20 UN summit, where we interviewed pioneers in sustainable development and named them the Ray Anderson Memorial Videos, www.theregenerationroadmap.com/videos.html
- 2 Authors' interview, Aug 21st 2017.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 The Corporation, 2004.
- 5 Interface website, www.interfaceglobal.com/sustainability.aspx
- 6 Authors' interview, Aug 21st 2017.
- 7 Authors' interview, Nov 27th 2017.
- 8 Interface website, www.interface.com/US/en-US/campaign/climate-take-back/Climate-Take-Back
- 9 Authors' interview, Aug 21st 2017.
- 10 Authors' interview, Nov 27th 2017.
- 11 Interface website, www.interfaceglobal.com/sustainability/interface-story.aspx
- 12 Ibid.
- 13 Interface website, www.interface.com/US/en-US/about/mission/Our-Mission
- 14 Jay Gould was promoted to the CEO position in March 2017.
- 15 Authors' interview, Nov 27th 2017.
- 16 Amodeo, R.A., "Becoming Sustainable at Interface: A Study of Identity Dynamics within Transformational Culture Change," unpublished doctoral dissertation, Benedictine University, Florida, 2005.
- 17 Authors' interview, Nov 27th 2017.
- 18 Authors' interview, Aug 21st 2017.
- 19 Authors' interview, Nov 27th 2017.
- 20 Authors' interview, Aug 21st 2017.
- 21 Co-founder and Chief Scientist for the Rocky Mountain Institute.
- 22 Environmentalist, entrepreneur, and author. His most recent book is *Drawdown*.
- 23 Co-founder of the Biomimicry Institute.
- 24 Founder of Forum for the Future.
- 25 A non-profit organization founded in Sweden.
- 26 Authors' interview, Nov 27th 2017.
- 27 Ibid.
- 28 Authors' interview, Aug 21st 2017.
- 29 Authors' interview, Nov 27th 2017.
- 30 Ibid.
- 31 In 2004, for example, Anderson was invited to a Walmart retreat with senior leaders where he helped plot a course for Walmart toward a more sustainable enterprise.
- 32 Authors' interview, Aug 21st 2017.
- 33 Authors' interview, Nov 27th 2017.
- 34 Ibid.
- 35 Ibid.