



Julie Gilhart:

Good evening, everybody. I'm so honored to be here, yet nervous. So please bear with me. I could easily do this without paper, but I have a severe case of butterflies. My name is Julie Gilhart, and I'm a bit out of my element tonight. I'm a fashion director for Barneys New York. I've been beating the pavement this week seeing all the New York fashion shows. But this is the one that I'm actually most excited about. This is the one where I can talk about my hero, Yvon Chouinard, the founder and owner of Patagonia.

[Applause]

I'm so glad you clapped at that point. About a year ago, some business associates of mine were traveling to Ventura, California to meet Yvon, and I made sure I was available to go with them. You know, for me, he's like a rock star, you know, someone you admire from afar but that you think you'll never meet. Well, I did. And for me, it was love at first sight. In fact, I have a terrible teenage-like crush on him. Meeting Yvon — well, meeting Yvon, a self-proclaimed dirt-bag climber, and surfer who has managed to single-handedly craft a company, and this is really important to listen, single-handedly craft a company that has inspired us all from an environmental, a marketing, and a product design perspective, was for me encountering a design genius. Obviously, as fashion director at Barneys, I'm deeply entrenched in the fashion world. I have been exposed to every designer — good and bad — but fortunately some of the greatest designers of our time. And Yvon Chouinard and Patagonia have caused me to have this sort of constant — as I'm sitting at the fashion shows especially — I have this constant lingering siren call to quit my job and become a so-called dirt-bag hippie and travel the world with Synchilla fleece on my back and the waves and mountains and snow at my fingertips. And this ability to inspire people, to lead a life in the outdoors, and especially with the world of nature being so important and a priority, is why we're here tonight to honor Patagonia for a corporate leadership award.

Patagonia is known for a lot of things. Their award-winning catalogs with breathtaking photography, a website with clean design and inspiring stories, their environmental campaigns and grant giving, their pioneering use of recycled soda bottles and fleece. But one thing they aren't known for is high fashion. Well, I have to debate that because I'm actually going to a fashion party afterwards, and I have on a Patagonia trench and I have on Manolo Blahnik shoes, I have on Balenciaga shorts, and I have on a Kiki de Montparnasse top, but I have on a Patagonia trench. So — and I'm so happy.

[Applause]

I wasn't going to tell you all this story, but it's one of my favorite stories. I'll talk about it later and it's the organization that Yvon Chouinard started called One Percent for the Planet, and it's probably the most beautiful organization that I've ever encountered in terms of charitable giving. There was a friend-raiser — not a fundraiser but a friend-raiser. I mean, who does a friend-raiser but Patagonia? So, I was there, and there's a collection that we buy, Lauren Pierce, which is actually designed by Lauren Bush, who happens to be George Bush's

niece. I'm not sure if I should be telling this, but anyways, she's a beautiful girl with a beautiful heart, and she does things from a socially conscious point of view. And this collection that she had done, she worked with women in the Congo to dye fabric and she used that fabric to put into her collection, and she gave ten percent away to — gave ten percent to this organization called Women to Women. So she came to the friend-raiser, and so I introduced her to Yvon. And "Yvon," I said, "this is Lauren Bush," and he immediately like click, click, click, and he said, "Your ears are funny." And Lauren stood there and was like — you know, she's really such a sweet girl, very polite. And then I said, "Well, Lauren designs a clothing collection, and she also gives money away from her profits." And he said, "How much do you give?" And she said, "Ten percent." And then his eyes sparkled up and then he said, "Well, my daughter has designed a trench for Patagonia." And I was thinking, wait, trench, sports? So I asked him, I said, "What sport is that for?" And in one second — I'm telling you in one second — he said, "Man hunting." [Laughter] And I was just like, I have such a crush on you. [Laughter]

So anyways, Patagonia [chuckles] — Patagonia likes to say that every fashion forward thing they've done has been a happy accident. For example, many of us might not know that Patagonia made color important in the outdoor apparel world. They brought bright mango, electric red, and royal blue to a drab outdoor industry full of khakis, browns and multi-greens. They also made popular the fleece, which we all know is worn by every college student in the world, and taught all of us that organic cotton and recycled fibers could be beautiful. The great thing about Patagonia is that they're not concerned with transitory fashion trends. They stick to clean, simple designs, both in their products and their marketing materials, and build products that are relevant [sic] today and will be relevant [sic] in twenty years from now. The ironic thing is in all of Patagonia's efforts to not be fashionable, they actually are. And the fact now is the time — we're in a time now where too cool for school is not cool. So it's a time where I feel like the energy is actually in the culture of Patagonia. What also sets Patagonia apart is the fact that it's a company that's committed to earning credibility rather than buying it. They are a company that would rather inspire than promote. You don't see Patagonia ads very often, and that's because they are a word of mouth brand that views advertising as the last resort. In fact, Yvon Chouinard made a tactical decision many, many years ago to not advertise in big cities, on billboards, in mainstream magazines. Their company chooses to inspire through their catalogs, their storytelling ability, and their timeless designs.

And all of these efforts are done entirely in-house. The company does not work with an agency, which is amazing. In fact, when AIGA called them to notify them of the award and asked who is the agency of record — they will present your award — Patagonia was like, huh, what agency? Yvon likes to say, you can teach a climber how to market but you can't teach a marketer how to climb, and it's true. The authenticity and inspiration behind this brand is the work of climbers, skiers, surfers, endurance athletes — people who carry the dirt-bag tradition established by Yvon back in the seventies. So in honor of Patagonia's thirty plus years of inspiration, including everything from catalogs to, get this, thirty-five million

dollars they have given to environmental organizations through their One Percent [applause] for the Planet

[Applause]

Through their One Percent for the Planet organization, which is how Barneys got involved because it was a way we could sell fashion and contribute back. So, during Fashion Week, we have a little window with organic t-shirts where part of the proceeds go back to One Percent for the Planet. But anyways, to that point, I'm so happy to present them with the Corporate Leadership Award. Thank you.

Rob BonDurant:

Thank you so much, Julie, for such a warm introduction, and thank you, AIGA, we're deeply honored, and congratulations to our friends at JetBlue. Let me just take a very quick diversion, and by a show of hands, I'd just like to see who here in this room grew up with a poster of Donald Trump in their bedroom. How about Lee Iacocca kind of posted in the school locker room? I don't see many hands. How many of us grew up thinking that at some time we wanted to become business people? Well, you know, not so much. Neither did I, but here we are tonight.

We're a little bit different. We spend our childhoods daydreaming at Patagonia of growing up to be something different. I suppose if we have to define ourselves, we call ourselves reluctant business people. Those formative years after we're done pretending to be astronauts and firemen and perhaps Olympic athletes are spent pursuing what some folks call ludicrous and asinine sports — I know my mother does — like rock climbing and surfing and mountain biking and whatnot. But like all the employees of our company at Patagonia, I was encouraged to maintain the values that were kind of built as the result of a life lived close to nature, a life lived outside, a life that was passionately involved with unconventional sports and the unconventional lifestyles that came with them.

You know, for context, we began building tools for rock climbers, tools that your life literally depended upon, tools that could afford a failure rate of absolutely zero. Over the decades, we've diversified our business, but we've never forgotten the importance of those first ideals. And from a design perspective, we've never forgotten what we've learned through our love of climbing, like efficiency, tenacity, partnership, simplicity, ethics, and we brought all those aspects into our apparel, our retail stores, our websites and our catalogs. And with this in mind, we emulate in product design and communications an adherence to a natural law, the ultimate — the ultimate principle of simplicity. And really, we believe that to achieve this end, to refine the curve of a sleeve, the slope of a hood, the drape of a pant, well, we find the perfection is finally achieved not when there's nothing left to add but in fact when there's really nothing left to take away. And this is our mantra. It's a mantra that is a rallying cry and it's a guidepost and it's easy to understand.

I suppose if I think it through, we're best known for building industrially driven designs and making them beautiful, inspiring, perhaps resolute, and sometimes, yes, even fashionable. We favor timeless design. We purposefully do not chase transitory fashion trends for fear that such practices may lead to market-driven compromise, which is not something my CFO is super-happy about. But in our communications, we treat our customer as we would like to be treated — as a trusted friend. We favor photojournalism over Photoshop, and we insist that our stores absolutely become and always are a gift to the communities in which they reside. We don't believe that our customers are out to buy a life or, in other words, at Patagonia, we're not playing to an image of who we want to become but instead we're celebrating who we are.

Our company, Patagonia, is an experiment. Granted it's an experiment that's been in existence for over thirty-five years, but it's an experiment nonetheless. We exist to challenge conventional business, and we exist to present a new style. Simply put, Patagonia and its thousand-plus employees have the means and the will to prove to the rest of the business community and, of course, to the design community that we can make a healthy profit. We can build a sustainable business, and we don't have to lose our soul in the process.

Thank you to my team at Patagonia. Thank you for boldly forgetting best practices whenever appropriate. Thank you for collectively moving our vision forward and, most of all, for just caring so damn much. And thank you, AIGA, for this coveted honor. We couldn't be more thrilled, more humbled, or proud. Cheers.

[Applause]