



Sustainable Business, Sustainable Living

Ed Begley Jr.

Los Angeles, USA

Ed Begley Jr. was a 20-year-old struggling actor who was deeply impacted by the first Earth Day. That historical day, April 22, 1970, launched what would become a global environmental movement. “I was watching the future being made in real time,” Ed reflects. “It was a very humbling experience to be a part of it.”

It really got him thinking: imagine what the future could look like if the momentum from this one-day event was leveraged to make an even broader impact. Ed reached out to the leaders who had organized Earth Day, like U.S. Senator Gaylord Nelson, and posed a question: “It’s fine to have this one day,” he said. “But as a movement, and a community, what are we going to do for the other 364 days?”

Many responded with ambitious plans to expand efforts to clean up the land and water around the country. “I knew this was important,” Ed says. “I lived in smoggy LA, and could see how needed these programs were. So I committed to doing my part to live sustainably.” And he has ever since.

Ed got an impressionable nudge from the man he admired most in the world. “My father said to me, almost as a challenge, ‘I know what you are against, Eddy. The smog. Well - what are you for?’ I knew what he meant. And he was right. I’ll never forget those words. My father remains a great inspiration for me.”

Ed describes his father as “a conservative who liked to conserve.” “Growing up, we turned off the lights. Turned off the water. Saved tin foil. We never used the word environmentalism. We just knew this was something we all needed to do. I still feel this way. Republican, Democrat, Independent, Green Party. We can argue about different things. But I say, let’s all agree on this: Do we want to clean up the earth? Put more money in your pockets? Have intact forests and oceans for our kids and grandkids? Great. Then we’re all environmentalists! Let’s do it.”

Now for over 50 years, Ed has lived sustainably, carrying that legacy from the time he was a struggling actor to a household name. He started small: recycling, composting organic matter, eating vegetarian, and buying an inexpensive solar vehicle, a Taylor Dunne. “Soon I realized that going green was actually cheaper,” he says. “So I saved, and used my savings to build up my commitment incrementally. I went from the Taylor Dunne to a Toyota Prius, which really pushed solar driving tech forward. Then I tried out the Nissan Leaf. Now I’m driving a Tesla. That led to trying out wind energy. I tried PacWind too. It took me 20 years of saving to be able to afford solar power on my home—but I’ve never looked back. There’s a long list of things you can’t do, but there’s a lot longer and more interesting list of the things you can do.”

Practicing what he preaches has become a whole way of life for Ed. He is now a big believer in the power of education and outreach to raise public awareness of what each of us can do to be environmentalists. “It’s why I write books. It’s why I speak to young people. I contribute in my small way. What Greta Thunberg is doing – to take a sailboat across the Atlantic—I couldn’t do something like that, so I do what I can. But thank goodness she is! The way that people young and old are responding to her is amazing. She’s inspired me to get out there and do more. A lot of us from the earlier generation felt like we were in low gear for a while. She got us reinvigorated.”

Both living and teaching sustainable living is essential for Ed; he knows that personal action alone won’t solve this problem. Whether it’s his actions or Greta’s, there needs to be an infrastructure supporting this change. “It’s not just

about me recycling my bottles,” he says. “Legislation and corporate social responsibility (CSR) are major parts of this equation - three parts of a triangle, really.”

On the legislative front, Ed points to a long list of environmental crises that he's seen remedied in his lifetime. The Hudson River in New York City was so polluted that you couldn't safely swim in the waters. Now it has burgeoning fisheries thanks to the Clean Water Act. The Cuyahoga River in Northeast Ohio that caught fire in 1969, does not catch fire anymore. “Los Angeles gives me hope,” Ed says. “Even though there's four times the number of cars here, and millions more people, we have a fraction of the smog today than we did in 1970. This is because of the Clean Air Act. That's a real success story.”

Ed himself runs a sustainable business, featuring a line of green indoor cleaning products called Begley's Best. His formulas include floor and counter cleaners, waterless pet shampoo, dish soap, wrinkle remover, and more. “I wanted to show that a business can have a conscience,” he explains. “We can be ethical and drive these healthy habits while being profitable at the same time. Look at what Jeffrey Hollender has done with Seventh Generation. Take businesses like Ben & Jerry's, or innovators like Ray C. Anderson of Interface. There's lots of people doing well by doing good and I want to encourage more of it.”

As is the case with everything Ed does, he lives the change he wants to see in the world of sustainable business. Through his family foundation, he gives tens of thousands of dollars of profits from Begley's Best each year to support green initiatives he believes in.

For all of the sustainable business leaders doing great things, Ed wants to make sure they balance their outlook with a sober take on the situation at hand. “We still have plenty of areas in crisis. Most importantly, we have people from low-income communities who are struggling, and they need our help the most. I encourage more businesses and individuals to take on these challenges, because every bit makes a difference.”

For young people, who have inherited the climate situation we are in, Ed has a candid message, “I'm sorry. I make a sincere apology to those that will come after me. We certainly tried. I wish I could have done a better job.”

With his voice of sage wisdom and experience, he adds, “We need to be honest, and we have to accept that there is going to be some continuing loss and some damage. But don't stop because of that. There's so much left that we can save. And Mother Nature is resilient. So, I believe it's incredibly important to be hopeful. We've seen what happened with all the doom and gloom. So, let's remind ourselves of the good news from time to time.”

Ed believes we owe a great debt of gratitude to the current youth environmental leaders who have brought the conversation into the mainstream once again. “Thanks to Greta Thunberg and other youth charging us into the future, I'm filled with more hope every day. They have challenged us to do everything we can, precisely because there is hope. Yes, the situation is dire, but many things can be fixed, and made right, and protected. They've showed us the way forward. Now it's time for us to come together as one and step up to the challenge.”

The future will either be green or not at all.

Bob Brown

Call to Action: To keep up with the sustainable business ventures that Ed Begley is building and supporting, visit www.begleyliving.com.

Stone Soup Leadership Institute
www.stonesoupleadership.org
www.soup4youngworld.com