

Do Good. Look Great.

By YI-LING

Amanda Rinderle and Jonas Clark started with a simple desire to find high-quality, sustainably sourced and responsibly manufactured goods. Though they could easily find eco-friendly alternatives in every other industry—from Method soap to Honest Tea—there were few options when it came to clothing. “There were brands like Patagonia, which we could wear if we wanted to go hiking or climbing, as well as yoga companies and smaller granola-y brands that did sustainable wear,” says Amanda, “but there was nothing that you could wear to the office.”

To fill this gap in the market, the couple created Tuckerman and Co., an apparel company that makes high-quality, long-lasting, and environmentally responsi-

ble clothing. In contrast to the business model of most clothing brands, which focuses on low-cost materials and cheap labor, the dress shirts made by Tuckerman use organic cotton woven in Italian fabric mills and assembled here in the United States. And unlike the “fast-fashion” model, which emphasizes producing clothing quickly and cheaply, the company site jokes that they are “unabashedly slow fashion.”

Although Patagonia does not make work clothing, Amanda and Jonas have always admired the brand because of its mission-driven approach. Patagonia was one of the first companies, for example, to undertake a company-wide switch to organic cotton in 1996. “Sure, there are a few brands who have

done one-off sustainable things, but that is very different from a company saying we’re doing this because this is what we stand for, and we’re going to do this company-wide, even if it’s risky,” says Amanda. “The sense of mission is baked into the brand.”

This sense of mission is thoroughly baked into Tuckerman and Co as well. Tuckerman, along with companies such as Patagonia, Ben and Jerry’s, and Warby Parker, is a benefit corporation. Unlike a traditional corporation, a benefit corporation’s social and environmental goals are written into its legal charter. “If I’m running a standard corporation and I make a decision that is good for the environment but has some costs in the short-run, my shareholders could toss





me out,” explains Jonas. On the other hand, benefit corporation shareholders judge performance based on how the corporation does across financial, social, and environmental goals.

Tuckerman is also the first start-up benefit corporation launched out of Yale. Jonas and Amanda are currently both second-year students at the Yale School of Management. Prior to Yale, Jonas lived in Cambridge where he worked as a dean at Harvard College and mentored a number of undergraduate entrepreneurs and Amanda worked as a social impact consultant at FSG. One of the biggest challenges in running Tuckerman and Co. is being full-time students at the same time.

Despite that challenge both co-founders acknowledge that there are great benefits to running a start-up in the context of the Yale School of Management. “This is a business school that has always prided itself in having a strong social or civic sense of responsibility,”

says Jonas. “When you take that culture of SOM and bring it together with entrepreneurship there is a great ‘synergy’, if you’ll pardon the MBA-speak,” he adds. Indeed, according to Amanda, not only does the entrepreneurship program offer a dedicated workspace, but SOM itself is a very close community, one where they could run into someone in the hall, or casually stop by their professor’s offices to seek advice and bounce ideas. “Robert Shiller—the Nobel laureate in economics—is actually one of the early backers of our Kickstarter campaign,” says Amanda.

Amanda and Jonas have been, in the last few weeks, steadily trying to wrap up the Kickstarter campaign they started to raise money for the company. “One of the greatest challenges in creating a start-up where you are making a physical product instead of software is the issue of having to produce the good before somebody pays for it,” explains Amanda. “Kickstarter is great because you have people

pre-ordering your products in advance.”

Although they are currently occupied by the campaign, both Amanda and Jonas have far-reaching goals for Tuckerman and Co. “We want to satisfy more than just a small niche. We want to be a mission driven, but also mainstream clothing brand accessible to a relatively large market,” explains Jonas. “Tuckerman needs to be taken seriously as a company in order for us to really maximize our impact on the apparel industry.”

It is this kind of ambitious, long-range vision that Jonas encourages aspiring entrepreneurs to have. “Sometimes the default metric for entrepreneurs is “what will work,” says Jonas “but standing for something that is big and has a large impact can be more rewarding, even if it’s harder to pull off.”

“I think Tim O’Reilly once captured this sentiment in a quote,” he says. “Do something where even if you fail, the world will be better for it.”