

**CAROLINE [00:12]:**

Hello and welcome to Mind Your Ps, The Purposeful Leader's Guide, we believe in all the Ps, people, purpose, planet, even pizza and prosecco. This week we're speaking to Emma Macdonald, Company Director and Co-founder of the Tartan Blanket Company, a company that brings a modern twist to Scottish heritage. They produce not only gorgeous, fashionable, and cosy blankets and scarves, but a positive impact on their community and the world. Emma it's great to have you here. Thanks for coming on.

**EMMA [00:41]:**

Lovely to be here and be involved. Thank you for having me.

**CAROLINE [00:45]:** Emma, let's just kick-off. Tell us a little bit about your story and how did you start the business and where is it now?

**EMMA [00:54]:** About nearly seven years now, I was living down in London and working as a fashion buyer, and my husband Fergus, ran a kilt company up in Edinburgh, and where we were both from and where we met. We just, decided that we really wanted to move home, we wanted to start a family up north and just get settled back in Edinburgh where we loved. There wasn't so much in the way of retail head offices back up in Scotland. We thought about the different options, and we decided that we want to start a business together.

We considered a few different businesses and routes to go down. It was really win with both Fergus' business and the kilt business and the Highland wear industry. We came across these amazing woollen tartan blankets, but it was really hard to find anything that was a bit more modern and also to understand the sustainability aspect of how they were made, and where the wool came from, and things like that.

It felt like a real gap in opportunity in the market. That is where the Tartan Blanket Co. idea came from. Then we moved back up to Edinburgh, and we ran both businesses alongside each other for a while. At the time, Blanket Co has just grown and grown and grown over the last, say over six years now. It's like we focus a lot on sustainability and we've got a community there. Now we sell internationally and we also sell to a lot of boutiques worldwide, including Liberty of London, and we're just about to go into Anthropologie, so yeah!

**CAROLINE [02:27]:** Brilliant. It sounds so exciting. Emma, when I look at your blankets, I know that you do some great stuff for animals, dogs isn't it? Dog blankets. I honestly would buy one for my dog over my family, I think. They're just brilliant and I really love what you say on your website about your main company goal being to be a business that focuses on sharing warmth and embracing the multiple physical and emotional meanings of that. Just tell us a bit more about that.

**EMMA [03:10]:** We love the concept of like a blanket really brings warmth. It's such a fundamental thing that people utilize and have done for so long. When a newborn baby's born, it's wrapped in a blanket, when someone's coming out like a rescue from somewhere, they're often wrapped in a blanket warmth, or when someone's a lot older and they're frail, they're wrapped in a blanket and it just feels like there's real comfort blanket element. We loved that thing of like really sharing that warmth and comfort aspect and being able to share that warmth with loved ones.

We really embrace that and that's what we really thought about to every element of business and the brand. Really, we don't feel like people are buying just the blanket or just a scarf from us, what they're buying is that feeling that when you get it and it's like it's boxed beautifully. All the elements really speak to that and branding that says like this is made with love, it's a warm, it offers warmth and comfort. You can show how much you care about someone by gifting them one of our pieces. We've just really tried to embrace what's the product do, but then how can we carry that through to all of the brand elements and make it more about just selling blankets and

more selling and that feeling.

**CAROLINE [04:36]:**

I love that. I think, aside from creating those amazing cosy blankets, how do you bring that commitment to warmth and kindness and slowing down to life within your company?

**EMMA [04:51]:**

That's been really important for us, is how we are able to share warmth with the wider community and also within our company. Outside we've always from the start really thought about how our manufacturing is done and how we work with our partners. We have really developed strong relationships with them, and it's a much closer relationship than a supplier. Relationship often is in retail. We went over, we visited them, and we know their families and families for stuff, there's things like in India, where our recycled and blankets are made, and our partner over there, at first we were like, "Can we get the fringing, a little bit more uniform, it can be quite ad hoc and thicker, thinner or things like that."

Then we actually understood that they handle the fringes. We said, "He has the machinery to do it, and it's part of the machinery with weaving." By hand rolling, then he supports a much larger community over there. For him, that was really important and supports that community, and that he lives in, we really wanted to embrace that.

We said, "That's fine, we'll support you to make sure that you're supporting your community." Actually, when we understand that, then that actually adds more to our blankets rather than just trying to get them processed. It's about what goes into making them. There's all these things with that aspect. Internally with our team, it's really about making sure that everyone's working all together. Everyone really focuses on what is the best outcome for the customer and what's the best outcome for the planet, so that they're making really informed decisions about, is that going to make the customer happy? Like our customer service team, that's our customer happiness team, because it's all about making sure that the customer is happy, not just answering questions and stuff.

We really want to follow that all the way through the journey. Then the team really embrace that as well. I feel like, we do things like duvet days, people can take a duvet days which means that they're just not feeling great. They can do that on short notice and take the time off to really focus on themselves, which is really important. We always have team time, once we can get together. Tonight, actually, we've like a, we're having an event we've just set out, it's like a Mexican online cooking event. They've all got boxes of things to make some fresh tacos and stuff and margaritas. Just like these little events to try and get everyone especially when everyone's virtual at the moment working together.

**CAROLINE [07:42]:**

The biggest question about that, Emma, is there tequila?

**EMMA [07:46]:** There is tequila. I was like that has to be there. You can't have a Mexican food without margarita.

**CAROLINE [07:54]:**

That's brilliant. Listen, you shared a lot about your commitment to positive social impact and your decision to join 1% for the planet. Can you tell us a little bit about this? I suppose has social impact always been part of your plan? Is it something that's come later? Tell us about that.

**EMMA [08:12]:**

Like I said, from the start, we've always wanted to have this positive impact. We really started off at the supply chain end, like how is our product made? Understanding how a product is made, it's a big thing about why we don't produce in Scotland that we've written about that to get asked a lot. It's really understanding where that will come from, how is it made, and you don't get that transparency over here. We go to source instead. We focused on that. Then we really brought it into, like, what's in our packaging, making sure that sustainable becoming paper-free in the office, and just all these different aspects like we had a direct impact on. Then last year, we did events to donate to charity and Christmas, we would often donate part of the revenue to charity. We felt like last year, we really wanted to inbuild it and ingrain it into our business. We made a positive impact pledge to donate 1% of company revenues to the planet, and 1% to people in need.

We really felt like being able to donate not just to the environment, but to the social impact would mean that we were every time with all our growth, so did our positive impact growth. That's been really great to see and not to worry, like, "Oh, can we afford this month to donate some money? Or how do we build that bottom line?" It's built into every aspect that we do that is what we are committed to doing. Building it into your business from this like, not necessarily from the start it took a while for us to figure out how to make it work. That worked for us. We probably would have done this from a start if we had really thought about it at the time, but obviously, like focusing on the suppliers and all the other elements coming together. We were really like, "This really works." This means that you don't need to think about donating, you're just doing it as you go which is really good.

**CAROLINE [10:13]:**

It feels it's really ingrained and it's part of your culture. How do you get the team to engage with this stuff?

**EMMA [10:23]:**

I think our team is always focused on that kind of sharing warmth. We hire really focused around our core values and one of them is actually shared warmth. I think there's a certain amount of taking responsibility as well. We take responsibility for our impact as a business, and we want our team to take responsibility for their work, for their impact, for themselves and share warmth gives that kind of caring for others. I think the team inherently, but the people that we hire have those attributes. They're really concerned with all these different elements. I feel like we discuss about who are we doing meeting with who we're working with at the moment. They get really involved in that impact that we can have.

We also have a book club and so we read different books and stuff that, which also brings out really interesting conversations about elements for improvement and development that we can have both as people and as a company. It's always just getting everyone involved in that whole process about-- it's not just a tick box. It's really about people can feel they're sharing their ideas for the ways that we can be better. Then we're taking action as a result of that.

**CAROLINE [11:44]:**

Love that, Emma. I really, really love that. That's a brilliant idea. Listen, you've had some great successes over the last few years and well done on all the hard work. I know how difficult it is, but what have you learned about people leadership in the process of your work? How have you evolved?

**EMMA [12:07]:**

I've learned a lot and so it's still evolving a lot and we're getting better and we're learning what works and also what's needed at each stage of the company, that's quite different at a startup stage what's needed and when you start becoming a much bigger team and having to manage a lot more people. That has changed a lot over time and definitely we've moved from more of doing roles to leading roles. It's really about focusing on how is

everyone being their best? How are they turning up to lead their teams and develop themselves? That's really our goal. If everyone's working at optimum and working collectively.

Then really that's the only thing that we need to do to ensure that the business is working at its best and giving them a clear strategy of like this is where we want to go, but allowing them the freedom to figure out the best way to get there for them and their teams. I think that is definitely a rule, that support, that connection of all the different departments and that just clear directions so that everyone's confident about what they're working towards. That's changed over time and we've got better at it. One of the biggest learnings, as well as just being about finding the right people.

For a long time we hired an often, you can get overwhelmed by how much experience someone has and they can just do the job from tomorrow so that's great, but actually, we've learned the biggest hiring then we need to focus on is the values, do they share our company values? If they do, they can have no experience and they can learn that experience and they can be an amazing fit and bring some amazing attributes to the company.

**CAROLINE [12:53]:**

How do you know that Emma? How do you recruit based on values? Is there specific questions you ask or what's the process?

**EMMA [14:02]:**

I think we've learned a lot, so I'll see a lot more mistakes and things and I think there's definitely been huge learnings of what is the right fit for us, what's not, and our values have evolved over time as well. Now we're really confident in who we are and where our values aren't. It's much easier to find out who is that person? How do they fit? Almost as a business, it's so important to start with what are your values and what does that look like? Then you can say, "Okay, well, do these questions offer the insights?" Decide if that you can assess them. Then we have a probation period to see how that person settles it and is it a right fit? A big thing has been not to think of it as is that person a good person or a bad person, but does that person fit our values?

If they don't they're going to have a much more successful experience in another company where their values are aligned and they can succeed. Whereas if they stay in a company where you're constantly asking them to change as a person, that's such a negative experience for them and for you. I think that's been a huge learning for us to be like this was a bad fit, so we need to let that go, work on it. If that doesn't work, then we need to understand that that's not the right fit. Then it will just become a lot clearer about how we assess those values. Therefore, in the last year, most of the people that have joined us, we see as really long term people versus it took a while. There was a lot of change a few years ago as we were really establishing who we are as a company.

**CAROLINE [15:42]:**

Emma, do you obviously the people that are important to you and you'd evolve in all the time as a leader, but do you believe that every company should have a clear purpose beyond profit? Of course, profits are absolutely critical for the success and growth of a business, but what's your thoughts on that?

**EMMA [16:03]:**

I think, years back or whatever it was a bit clearer because it was you make a profit or you're in the tech space or there was just easy success factors. Whereas I feel now it's much more about who you are as a company and who you are as a brand. I think due to social media and just the access that people have it's so much easier to hold companies accountable and to ask them those hard questions. Companies can't hide behind things anymore. If they put out something and it's proved to be wrong, or people ask those questions, they have to have

the backup to justify that. Also people's awareness of impacts on the planet and things that, it's so much stronger now.

People are way more interested in that when they decide who to make their purchase with. I think they used to be quite different, but now it's just, you have to do that to have a long-term future. Ultimately companies need to decide between short-term monetary goals or longer-term success. The shorter-term monetary goals are getting harder and harder, I think now because you have to have that transparency. I think it's really important, but it's also really important now you have to be genuine with it as well and not try and fake it because I think that will get exposed.

**CAROLINE [17:40]:**

Yes, for sure. We're seeing that the organisations that we work with or that we're speaking to, there's some real drivers, there's organisations who've done this stuff for years and there's those that are supposed as awakening to that. COVID-19 has been part of that awakening, really climate change, inequalities, poverty, these all things. You touched on something there that I think is really critical. Are the customers we all, as people have got more information at our fingertips, don't we, where we can make decisions. Have you had feedback from customers that say, "We decided to work with you because of the purpose and impact stuff you do?"

**EMMA [18:23]:**

We got amazing customers. Our customers are really passionate about the brand, You can go to a review site and again, reviews are so transparent these days. If you go in our reviews site, and there's thousands of amazing reviews. I feel like that's one of our proudest achievements because that's not us just winning an award or whatever that is, that's us. Every customer has had a personal experience with us. There's all reasons that they want to shop with us but the main thing is they come back and shop with us. Winning a customer once it's really hard, but then get keeping them to come back and wanting to buy from us again, because they've had such a great experience that they want to share that with their parents or their siblings or whoever it is, and then give them that experience and that lovely gift and that feeling of warmth. We really pride ourselves on being able to offer that to the customer. It's a lifetime customer and so-- sorry, I can't remember going off. I can't remember what the question was.

**CAROLINE [19:34]:**

[laughs] Got this little bit better right here, 29 minutes there tonight. No, it was just to beat the customer piece. I think that's the customer's actually giving that feedback themselves is so powerful. Isn't it? Because they're saying, "We were making a choice to choose you and the Tartan Blanket Company, because you are assuring us that you cared about more than just that making profits, the environment, and the people." What piece of advice, if anything, what's the one piece of advice Emma, that you would give to a business leader who might just be starting out high on this CSR journey? It's a big task, What advice would you give them?

**EMMA [20:18]:**

Yes, I think it is a big task and there's a lot of different ways that you can tackle it or that you can approach it. There's a lot of new ways as well and I think one of the biggest things, in general, is to really find your own path. It's great to look at what others are doing to get inspiration, but not to compare yourself against them. Really focus on what is it that you want to achieve, what's important to you, and what makes you happy. Then really focus on that and doing that really great, rather than trying to do everything in that scope because I think it-- Yes, there's just so many ways to look at it and do it now that you really can't do everything. If you spread yourself too thin, you're never really going to achieve anything really successful.

**CAROLINE [21:10]:**

Yes. Aside from your own, obviously, what's your favourite sustainable purpose-led fashion or brand in your space?

**EMMA [21:22]:**

I think it's been interesting because I think up till in fashion and there's not been amazing, sustainable fashion brands around. I feel like some are now-- They're starting coming up and they're great. Also, some big companies are now starting to focus on sustainability a lot more. I think there's still questions about whether that's true and real or how seriously are they taking it, but it's brilliant to see that these bigger fashion companies are putting it as a focus because that's what the customer wants.

Some smaller ones, I really like are Staff Clothing. They're quite a smaller company and they make really lovely jumpsuits and things. Also, Humphrey's Bag are another one. Yes, these are just smaller companies that I see doing something quite creative in their space and leading the way on more fashionable, sustainable fashion.

**CAROLINE [22:22]:**

Yes. We'll put some links to those actually because it's great to have a look at some others too. Okay, we've done a lot of bit of business, we're going to do a quickfire personal round to get to you and what's so. You obviously work alongside your husband, which I'm sure has its pros and cons. What is Fergus's most annoying habit?

**EMMA [22:45]:**

Probably that he's really into tech stuff. There's always a system to get the best outcome and I guess he's always, yes, trying to find a system to make everything work, which is great in a lot of ways, but sometimes also, there's personal aspects as well. I'm like, "That's important too."

**CAROLINE [23:14]:**

[laughs] What would be your ideal Saturday?

**EMMA [23:18]:**

I'd say a nice run on the beach with the dog and probably on my own to start with a headspace, it's really nice. I've got three young kids, it's hard to get that a lot. Then, yes, a nice barbecue with Fergus and the kids, and the sunshine, hopefully, and lovely family we're able to join in with that, hopefully, this summer. Yes, that'd be really nice.

**CAROLINE [23:40]:**

Sounds great. What do you think your family would be most and least proud of about you and what you've achieved?

**EMMA [23:49]:** I'm not sure about the least but most proud of, I think-- My mum is quite a big fan of fashion and homewares and stuff. I think getting into Liberty and Anthropologie was really exciting and just I guess to be put alongside those brands is really great. Also, I think in a family aspect. I definitely feel like and as CEO that the business-- for my girls growing up, I think seeing that as their mum in that position and as a woman, I think that's really-- I'm quite proud to be able to give them that. What's that word?

**CAROLINE [24:36]:**

Role model.

**EMMA [24:37]:**

Role model, yes. Just to show them what's possible, which I don't feel like was around when I was growing up. It didn't feel like it was such an equal world in business. Yes, I think it's great to be able to show that to them.

**CAROLINE [24:56]:**

Emma, just finally, tell us what's next for you in the Tartan Blanket Company, what's coming up in the future?

**EMMA [25:04]:**

Wow, lots of exciting things. Yes, it's been a bit of a whirlwind in the last year. Yes, we're just about to launch to Anthropologie and we've also got some amazing opportunities coming up for different international markets in the US, particularly. We're doing some very exciting collaborations this year with some very exciting people. Yes, there's a lot of exciting times ahead and a lot of big challenges still to overcome. Yes, we'll see.

**CAROLINE [25:37]:**

Brilliant. Listen, Emma, it's been an absolute pleasure speaking to you, and thanks for everything you do in the world of business in terms of your P's, your people, your purpose, and all the other great stuff that you're doing. Wish you all the best and we'll catch your story really soon.

**EMMA [25:57]:**

Thanks. It's been lovely to talk to you, Caroline.

**CAROLINE [25:59]:** Bye.

**EMMA [26:00]:** Bye.