

Transcript

Sustainability Day - 28 October 2020

Sustainable(ish) - Questions and answers with Jen Gale

If anyone's got any questions please do ask. If anyone wants to comment or anything, please do. But yes back to you, Lucy.

Lucy: That was brilliant. Thank you, Jen. We've had some really lovely comments in the chat of people saying how inspired they are about breaking it down into manageable chunks and that imperfect action, feeling like it's something they can conquer rather than trying to change everything at once.

Jen: Yes and the eco police aren't going to come around if you're not doing it exactly the same way that somebody else says you should.

Lucy: What was it, the big green, judgy bashy stick. A lot of people really enjoyed that one.

Jen: You all know the one I'm talking about.

Lucy: So I don't know if anybody has got any questions. If you've got one you're welcome to pop your hand up and we'll come to you so you can unmute your mic and if you want to pop your camera on that's great. If everyone's feeling a bit shy, I'm sure we've got some questions from some of our facilitators.

Jodi: We've got a lot of people actually talking about how they fared in lockdown, whether it's made them more sustainable, or less. A lot of people have found they're greener by not flying, not using the car, but sometimes it can get a bit difficult like forgetting your reusable cup because you're trying to remember your mask and things like that. So yes the general consensus, everyone is loving the idea that just small steps, and we're now getting some ideas of what people really want to do as their first small steps, like someone wants to make their own soap, things like that. It's really inspired people so this is what we've got so far.

Lucy: We got a hand up from Sarah.

Sarah: Hi Jen, that was brilliant. Thank you very much. I've learnt so much. I had a question about your stopping buying new. What was the thing that started you off? What were the key steps that made you make the decision to do that?

Jen: That's a really great question and one I get asked a lot, and do you know what I never can pinpoint 1 thing. I remember, my eldest was about 3, and that real typical toddler, you know, you're in the shops and he just wants all the things, all the bright, shiny things and I remember thinking, whoa he's already a consumer, he's already tuned in maybe to these messages of constantly getting new things. I don't know if that is a societal thing that we've put on our kids or whether it is some kind of evolutionary thing from whether there's some benefit to constantly looking for new things in an evolutionary way. But I remember being quite like, whoa, by that. Then also I read an article in a

magazine by a lady, she called it her Second-hand Safari. I think I'd just discovered Freecycle and Freegle and things like that. I remember thinking, I was genuinely so naive, that sounds fun. I just hadn't joined the dots at all. But doing a year buying nothing new is possibly a little bit extreme. But honestly, it's such an empowering thing. Try it for a week or a month. It really is a hugely empowering thing to do and to realise a little bit, this sounds quite sinister, but we are constantly being manipulated. We're constantly being told to upgrade and to buy new and that this thing will make us happy. I was invited to do a TEDx talk during that year, and the theme was Everyday Radicals and I was like, 'I'm not a radical, I'm quite good and I follow the rules'. But actually this realisation that it is quite a radical thing to do. It's quite countercultural. It's quietly disrupting the status quo isn't to just say 'No, actually my phone's alright, I'm just going to stick with it for another year or two or whatever'. But yes, that was a very long winded answer to your question.

Sarah: No, it was good. Thank you.

Lucy: Just following up from that Jen. How did you deal with getting friends and family on board, particularly your family? I guess with some of it they didn't have a choice by the sound of it.

Jen: The kids were little enough to not even really realise. It would be a really different proposition to do it again now, or to do it again when they're teenagers. My husband knows I'm someone who has a lot of amazing ideas so he just said alright and he knows that 9 times out of 10 I'm just distracted by the next one when it comes along. So I said I wanted to do this and he went, 'Oh right. Lovely'. Then I bought it up again a couple of weeks later and he was like 'Oh god' but actually once he started to realise that we were saving quite a lot of money by doing this as well, he was really good, he got on board quite quickly, and he was really good at fixing things. Then the wider family, my parents just didn't get it at all. I think they were just a bit like, 'What is she doing?'. I was really aware of, like I said in the talk about Christmas, I couldn't really dictate to them what they were buying and say I only want you to buy second-hand things and stuff like that. They were aware of what we were doing. I don't think they really got it. I think that to a certain extent you need to do this a bit by stealth don't you, show don't tell with family I think a lot of the time. Just make your changes and talk a little bit about the benefits without ramming it down their throats but we have to accept that sometimes we just can't change other people.

Lucy: Yes, and I suppose part of it is about motivating by example. I've found with my partner the same. That was so relatable when you said about being a big ideas person because I have a million ideas and about half, well probably a third of them actually come to any fruition. But my partner's slowly come on the journey with me. He's seen what I've been doing and thinks there's no reason why he can't do that. No, we can't change everybody but we're responsible for our own actions. So I don't know if there's any other questions.

Sam: Jen, you mentioned at the start that you've got an online community, 50-60,000 people, where is that found, or we can send that around afterwards as well.

Jen: I have a Facebook group that's about 16-17,000 people. So that's the biggest community in one place. Then I'm on Instagram. The Facebook page has got a reasonable following. Every week on email I send out a weekend prompt, it's supposed to come out on a Friday, it's Friday(ish). Sometimes it comes out on a Friday, sometimes it's the weekend. But the idea is that hopefully at the weekend maybe you've got a bit more time and it's suggesting something you can actually do that weekend. So it will be things like change your energy supplier, go out and do a litter pick, go and collect some acorns and stuff to plant because there's a project called 2 minute beach clean that are planting a 2

minute forest and asking everyone to plant native seeds at the moment to go and plant them in a field they've got in Cornwall and things. So if you want little nudges periodically then my email list is the place to come.

Sam: Excellent. Sounds good.

Lucy: Great. Thank you very much. So any more questions?

Jodi: One of the recurring themes that keeps coming up is Amazon. Do you think that maybe something as big as Amazon with everyone doing something little or by going against a huge company like that do you think we can make a difference even against something so big and so global?

Jen: Amazon is really difficult isn't it. I have a 6 week course that I do, 6 Weeks to Sustainabil(ish) and I did it in lockdown and I hadn't said anything. We were doing a bit around conscious consumption and I hadn't said anything about Amazon. But actually one of the people she said she'd just suddenly realised she's on Amazon every day. She was getting an Amazon delivery every day. I think in lockdown because we weren't going out and the shops weren't open it becomes that default doesn't it. You need something, you know you're going to be able to get it, you know you're going to be able to get it the next day. You know the price is probably going to be there or thereabouts. Actually she said that she's not saying she's never going to use Amazon again. But actually now what she's doing is just looking around to see if there is an independent place to buy something similar from or a local place she can buy something similar from. I feel like I'm just spouting quotes, but there's this brilliant quote that says, 'Every time you spend money, you're casting a vote for the kind of world you want'. So actually every time we buy from Amazon, we're saying 'We love you Amazon, we think you're amazing. We love what you're doing'. Then actually a lot of us will be going, 'God Amazon, Jeff Bezos, he's got so much money'. There's that sort of weird thing that we don't really like Amazon, but we actually really quite love Amazon. So yes, personally I haven't used Amazon for years, but again, that's not a very (ish) thing. So it might be that you decide you're going to keep using Amazon, but it's going to be your last resort rather than your first port of call, which I think is a really great way of looking at it. It has been such a difficult year hasn't it for businesses, and so, especially this Christmas, can we think about supporting local independent businesses because they genuinely do a happy dance when you buy something from them, rather than Jeff Bezos just chucking another pile of gold on his pile. I think this is where our choices can really have an impact. But yes if we are going to use Amazon, the more of us that kick off about their packaging or whatever, or the more of us that ask them to be treating their employees fairly, or the more of us that ask them to make sure that they're paying their taxes and actually say, 'If this doesn't change I am going to start moving more of my spend elsewhere'. Like I said, business will follow where the money is and especially a business as astute as Amazon. I think they will start to change. Well I hope they will start to change their practices.

Lucy: Yes hopefully. We've had a lot of comments of people saying that they're trying to shop at independent businesses for Christmas presents and what have you, or even using Etsy because the things are still being delivered to you so you've got the convenience, at least it's going to a small independent business rather than Jeff Bezos with his pile of money.

Just one of the things I have picked up on is people mentioning Christmas shopping in the chat. I've seen this on our Yammer group as well, people talking about how they're trying to be more

sustainable this Christmas, and I know that you've got something on that in your book. I don't know if you just want to spend 2 minutes before we finish on this.

Jen: I'm actually running a Crap-free Christmas Bootcamp at the moment and there's another one going on in November. My top tip would be, think about what you want Christmas to be and to mean to you. We'd fallen into this, my family had their traditions, I met my husband, his family had his traditions. We sort of mashed them together somehow. Then we had kids, but we didn't ever stop and think what do we want Christmas to be about for the kids? What memories do we want to create? What is that magic? What are those feelings that we want them to have? Christmas has become very much about stuff.

Because if you're like us, we're not religious so we don't have that religious element to it, but actually I want my kids to remember the time we spent together and maybe the arguments we had over the board games and going for walks and just that feeling of not having anything pressing to do and just being able to chill out together and all those things. It wasn't until we spent that year buying nothing new that I actually gave really any thought to our Christmas other than 'Oh god, what am I going to buy this person? And what am I going to buy that person'. So think about what it is you want Christmas to be and to mean, and how you can start to make that happen.

Remember that at Christmas I would say it's one of the most difficult times of year to create change because we've got all this societal pressure on us as well and all this family pressure and things like this. So it can be really, really difficult. So maybe you look at gift wrapping. A lot of the supermarkets this year have said they are not going to have glitter on their paper which is great because it makes it unrecyclable. So maybe you're just going to do a change like that. Maybe you're going to look for Christmas cards that haven't got glitter on. Maybe you're going to make sure that all your Christmas cards get recycled afterwards. Again, it's just these baby steps and thinking about what you can do. Meal planning, I know you've got a couple of talks on food, but meal planning over Christmas is going to be huge.

There's something like 54 million plates of food get wasted over Christmas or something really shocking like that. So thinking about how you can reduce that food waste and things like that, that can be really important as well.

There's a message in the chat somebody disagreeing with me. 'I'm very sorry, I'm afraid I disagree with the 'every little bit helps'. It allows people to think they've done something worthwhile but the effect they're having is very small. Unfortunately it's necessary to make some difficult changes'. Absolutely. But if I said to you that you're going to have to run a marathon tomorrow, you'd say that it's never going to happen. But if I said to you that you're going to have to run a marathon in April and actually, what we're going to do tomorrow is we're going to start the first day of Couch to 5k. You'd go, 'Awesome, I can do that'. So I absolutely agree that we need to make some big changes. But we're never going to get everybody giving up flying, giving up driving, giving up meat. But we can get everybody doing some small things and a proportion of them once they've started will go on to do these big things. But we can't get everyone to go from A to Z in one jump. We need to get them to go not even to go from A to B, we get them to go to A.1, A.2, A.3. I agree that there's this urgency, but we've got 10 years, I know Jo will talk to you about this, to reduce our individual carbon footprints and we can start doing that today.

Lucy: That's a good analogy Jen, I think that whole marathon thing is fantastic and really resonates with me because actually, like you said, if you said about me running a marathon tomorrow, there's

not a chance I would do it. But you know in 8 months' time you can build up and it's almost always like training to be greener isn't it. Alright brilliant, that was really helpful. Thanks, Jen. I think we've had a really good discussion in the chat and people seem really inspired. Thank you so much for joining us.

Jen: Have a marvellous day guys.