

Staying sane as a climate-tech founder

"Wow! That must be so purposeful!" This is a common reaction when I reluctantly tell people what it is my business does. We are a developer of carbon abatement and carbon removal projects at large scale to create a healthier earth (also our company name). In a world that is obsessed with purpose, this appears to be a holy grail of work. However, for me personally, it has been highly anxiety inducing. On top of building a business, I am also reminded daily about the reality of the challenges ahead of us.

Temps de lecture : minute

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When I started out, delving deep into the problem of climate change and what we could do to fix it, I learnt many depressing things about how intertwined emissions and our modern lives are. I've had to adopt a somewhat removed perspective to keep my anxiety within normal levels, changing the way I work, my personal routines and meditating every day. Without doing these things, my anxiety levels get to a level where I am ineffective and not very enjoyable to be around!

Here's some of the things I've learnt that have helped keep me sane...

The individual is *not* the problem

This idea was the first thing that I had to overcome. I hate the shaming that is being presented to everyday people about their actions and decisions. While I am acutely aware that consumption and diet have a huge potential impact, shame is not the answer.

My anxiety grew during the first couple years of A Healthier Earth to the point that I wasn't sleeping, my personal family relationships with my young children and wife were being negatively affected, and I wasn't effective at work. I worked with a therapist who happened to also be a trauma specialist, mainly out of convenience (he lived in my neighbouring village). He shared with me that both trauma victims and offenders both suffer from shame, which is a very powerful negative emotion but rarely leads to positive behaviours.

We need to change the system, not the individual. Otherwise it's like trying to keep the beach dry but fighting in the surf with the tide - it's fruitless. We need to change the fundamentals of our production systems to be low carbon and circular in nature. Trying to curb consumption may have a small impact but will be monumentally difficult to achieve. Blaming the individual is unlikely to lead to significant positive change.

Air Travel... is ok

I am acutely aware of the volume of carbon emissions from the flights I take. I often relate the scale of A Healthier Earth's carbon projects to the number of return flights from Heathrow to LA will emit (a circa 24-hour running time).

However, we are a social species. If we want to connect and progress our businesses, we still need face-to-face interactions. For A Healthier Earth, I will show my commitment to developing real-world, large-scale carbon removal projects by jumping on a plane to spend time with potential partners or investors. These relationships are built on person-to-person interactions as the projects are progressing.

Air travel unlocks connection but comes with a carbon footprint. We must therefore strike a balance. I look at whether these meetings can lead to a changed world, one where we can disrupt the carbon efficiency of all our

modern industries.

Waste... is someone else's opportunity

As a household, my family try to produce as little waste as we can, but having children has certainly increased our household waste. We cook most of our meals from scratch from raw ingredients, try to manage our consumption and recycle and upcycle where possible. However, being in the business I am in, I know the carbon footprint of dealing with this waste, and the fact that much of it piles up in landfill or is incinerated- because it's seen as having no value.

However, I am optimistic that our waste will become our biggest resource. Our climate issues exist because previously our emissions had 'no value'. We could extract 'free' energy from the earth, use it for our needs, and emit it without consequence. Those days are over, and the new models of industry that are emerging are very exciting for me. I believe the same will happen for our waste, and every time I put the bins out, I imagine the other entrepreneurs out there trying to make this a reality.

Remain optimistic about the future

To be effective as climate tech founders and lead our industry to remove and avoid many thousands of tonnes of carbon emissions, we need to be happy in our own right. That means healthy relationships with those around us, with ourselves and the future. We can't do that if we are constantly shaming ourselves about my purchases, not connecting with people face -to-face and worrying every day.

Purpose is hugely powerful. It can motivate you to get out of bed and make the difference you want to see in the world. If it goes unchecked, it can also lead to shame and living to a standard set by others. Staying sane while working purposefully is key.

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