

# Do Brands Truly Care About Environmental Sustainability?

*By Ralph Lauren – Executive Chairman and Chief Creative Officer*

## ***Sustainability in fashion is a myth.***

Harsh? Maybe. But let's be honest, every major fashion brand claims to be sustainable, yet the industry remains one of the biggest polluters on the planet. Every season, collections are rolled out stamped with buzzwords like eco-friendly, carbon-neutral, and responsibly sourced, while the mass production of cheaply made, disposable clothing continues at an unsustainable rate.

Achieving true sustainability in fashion requires a fundamental shift in how we create, consume, and circulate clothing.

## ***The Truth About “Sustainable” Fashion***

Fashion accounts for 10% of global carbon emissions and 20% of wastewater pollution (Business Waste, 2024). The industry produces 92 million tons of textile waste every year, and most garments end up in landfills within a short lifespan (Ramchandra, 2023).

Despite this, brands continue to push sustainability narratives that fail to address the root issue: the relentless speed and volume of production. Micro-trends pressure consumers to buy more, wear less, and discard clothing in the blink of an eye.

The current system is designed for disposability, not sustainability.

## ***How Fashion Brands Can Achieve Real Sustainability***

The fashion industry's core problem lies in the linear model most brands still follow: take resources, make products, use them briefly, and discard them as waste.

We need to replace this model entirely. My solution is a circular model, one that designs for longevity, embraces reuse, and prioritizes regeneration (Ralph Lauren, 2025d).

### **1. Designing for Timelessness**

Sustainability starts with design. By investing in high-quality materials and classic silhouettes, we empower consumers to wear, repair, and pass down their garments rather than discard them.

## 2. Enabling Product Longevity Through Recirculation

Waste in fashion isn't always due to unwearable clothing, it's often due to a lack of infrastructure to keep garments in use. A circular system addresses this with repair, resale, and rental programs that ensure clothing has multiple lives.

Brands must take responsibility for the entire lifespan of their products. Consumers should have access to care and repair services to keep their garments in top condition.

## 3. Investing in Circular Systems and Innovation

Fashion is self-expression, and chasing new trends is natural. Ignoring that reality would be naïve. But trends and sustainability don't have to be at odds.

Instead of resisting change, brands should redefine what "new" means. This shift happens in the recycling and design phases of the circular system.

Take a vintage Ralph Lauren blazer, maybe one your mother wore in the '90s. On its own, it's a beautifully structured piece. But with modern styling, it transforms. Pair it with relaxed denim and sneakers for a casual-chic look. A skilled tailor can also slightly crop the blazer or adjust the fit, making it feel brand new without the need to buy something disposable.

## ***Beyond the Illusion of Sustainability***

It's time for brands to stop selling the illusion of sustainability and start designing for longevity. Consumers are catching on to greenwashing, and soon, brands will have no choice but to evolve. The future of fashion depends on rethinking the system from the ground up. The industry must do better. And so must we. Because if fashion is truly about self-expression, let's make sure the statement we're making isn't one of waste, but of lasting impact.

## ***Ralph Lauren***

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