



channel mastery

Channel Mastery Podcast, 143: Chris Steinkamp, Principal and founder, Baselayer Group

www.channelmastery.com

Kristin: Welcome back everybody to another episode of the Channel Mastery podcast. Here we are at the beginning of August 2020, and a top question on so many people in my audiences mind is how do we connect brand with purpose and brand with impact? Our consumers we know want our brands to lead change. They want our brands to create the change they are not seeing from their governments or other institutions they used to see that change come from, and I have found a great expert to help us with this. Chris Steincamp, welcome to the show. You are the principal and founder of the Baselayer group.

Chris: Thanks, Kristin. It's good to be here.

Kristin: Oh, it's so awesome to have you here. I've wanted to have you on the show for some time. We've worked on a lot of things together, obviously with SIA, Snowsports Industries of America. Let's talk about your background and the reason you founded Baselayer.

Chris: Sure. just really quickly. So my career started in advertising in Los Angeles. I worked at a large agency in LA and I was part of an agency that was creating just amazing award winning campaigns that became part of the social fabric that created movements. And it really built brands with deep, deep loyalty, like Pepsi and Apple and Nissan. And it was just really inspiring to be part of that. So I was there for quite a long time and, but in 2007, I had an opportunity to start protect our winters with Jeremy. And I saw an opportunity to use my advertising background, to create a nonprofit with a little bit of a different approach. I'm more of a marketing sensibility to it. And really kind of a brand that was really not that much different than say the North Face, for example.

They have a real excitement and an emotional connection with their customers and their followers around their brand. And I wanted to do the same with Protect our Winters. We really didn't want people to, just to donate to us. So I feel guilty into doing it. We really want them to feel excited about what we were doing and what we were building. So we kind of redefined what nonprofits were doing in that space and with a new kind of consumer oriented brand that really engaged her supporters and engage them in our mission along with us. So then I started Base Layer and it was really the combination of both experiences because, you know, I saw two things. I saw how smart marketing can create movements, but also the power of corporations and brands to force change. And that's really the reason I started Base Layer. It was kind of the culmination of both of my big experiences in my career.

Channel Mastery | 140: David Howell, Howell & Associates
channelmastery.com - channelmastery@verdepr.com

Kristin: And that moved you to Boulder, or did you move to Boulder with Protect our Winters?

Chris: No. We brought Protect our Winters to Boulder from the beach in Los Angeles, we figured it was probably a better place to be.

Kristin: Agreed. That's awesome. So you're obviously like a perfect person, a great resource for us today. I'm really excited to dive in and discuss what you mean more about creating movements and building brands with deep loyalty. So many of our clients, and so many of the people in the Channel Mastery audience are really, they have the best of intentions. They so want to do the right thing. And, and it's 2020 has proven to be, I don't even know how to describe it. I mean, we're all living it, so I don't need to, but meaning for a brand and how they're communicating and how they understand their audience and their reach.

People are really becoming more and more aware that, that their, their workforce, their, brand fans and followers, they are looking to brands in specialty to do, to be the change they want to see. The change maker.

So I'm really excited to talk with you today about that and specifically like how you brought your advertising background into a nonprofit, into our space and really kind of, I think created a new type of new archetype, a new, almost a new category of nonprofit. Like what POW has done has been very different. So I'm curious to know if you can just share a little bit around, like, what it was like to start that company with Jeremy, what the vision was and kind of how you saw brands start to evolve with that with you.

Chris: Yeah. I mean, it was really exciting. Jeremy had this idea for Protect Our Winters before I

got involved. I'd heard from his brothers that he was kind of noodling around with starting a nonprofit and I had been a skier for, since I've been, since I was five. I, too, had seen how climate change was impacting these places that I was skiing. I wasn't going to Alaska or British Columbia, but I was skiing in Massachusetts and in Southern Vermont and New York and the places that I had learned to ski had been changing as well, and I really wanted to do something. And I just felt that getting involved with Protect our Winters was something that I really wanted to do. It really was a combination of my career kind of, well, not the culmination, but kind of the blending of my career, but also my personal interests.

So it was, it was really exciting. And I think that creating this brand that connected with people in an emotional way was the key to what our success was. You know, we really felt that something needed to be changed within the climate space. At the time, there were a lot of really amazing nonprofits doing a lot of really good work, but if we were going to connect with young millennials, snowboarders and skiers and winter sports enthusiasts, we really needed to do something different. And we modeled it really after a lot of the companies that were successful in the space already, like consumer brands and using athletes as our guides and using social media and using digital marketing. But I think what my advertising background taught me that I brought to Protect Our Winners was this understanding that marketing can change consumer behavior and it can

change, create movements. But also, you know, as we started Protect Our Winters we didn't have any resources and we, it was just Jeremy and myself. And so we built something that a lot of people didn't know about. And so there really needed to be an attention to detail and there really needed to be, it needed to seem bigger than what it really was. And I think having a marketing sensibility behind that and creating a brand that looked much bigger than it was at the time was important.

Kristin: Oh, absolutely. And you, you hit on something that is a perfect tee up for my next question. So you were able to create an emotional connection for a nonprofit following some key brand best practices at the time that maybe you had learned or seen, or Jeremy had seen, obviously through his sponsors, et cetera. Tell us what you're seeing now. You have a study that you'd like to share with the audience, because where we're going with this is at the time you definitely created a movement with consumers, but I think that the appetite for such movements in our specialty spaces is enormous. So tell us, share with us some of the data.

Chris: Well, I think just, I think for a second, what we learned to Protect Our Winters was that it wasn't enough just to say, get involved with us, just donate to us, or here's what we stand for. Our followers really wanted to get involved and they really wanted to roll up their shirt sleeves and do something. And that was really exciting at the time because we had this really passionate and almost fanatical community of people that said, Hey, look, we believe in what you're doing. I care too. Tell me what I need to do. And that's essentially what's going on in the marketplace right now.

Consumers want more than what they're getting. And you know, this koan study that came out just last year of a thousand Americans said that 87% of Americans said that they purchase a product because that company advocated for an issue that they cared about. So that number is astounding. And it just gives you an idea of the power of the consumers now. They want to get involved, they want to roll up their sleeves and they want to say, activate me.

Kristin: And we used to call that voting with their dollars. Right? And obviously we still do, but I mean, there was a study there's lots of studies coming out as you well know, but Edelman's sentiment study and loyalty study. They did a special one in March that we've referenced a lot on the Verde you know, special COVID resource podcasts, but it was in the high 70th percentile globally of consumers that are literally looking to brands to help make the change happen either with their governments or for instead of the government. Right. And so I think that that 87% is probably still super accurate, but it could be even higher. It's crazy.

Chris: Yeah. There's really not much more room, is there? And companies that see that, you know, they see this opportunity because consumers are asking for transparency and they're asking for visibility with their brands that they support, but they're also asking for an urgency in solving these problems and, you know, essence, they're asking their brands to lead and in trade, they'll give those brands their loyalty and it's pretty fanatical.

Kristin: Yep. And that's another thing we're seeing is a consumer loyalty is up for grabs in two

areas. One is their life, their day to day has changed so much that they're changing. They're open to new brands and new experiences because of how just impacted they are. They can't go and do the same thing. So they're like, okay, whoever provides me with the easiest, most friction-free experience, they have some of my loyalty, but the real deciding factor is ethical alignment. Absolutely. And that's ultimately why I wanted to connect with you today. So let's talk a little bit about that. Cause obviously like I'm a communications pro, you're a marketing and a nonprofit pro and you're creating, I think, a new paradigm of, of nonprofit support and consumer brand supporting what you have at Base Layer. It's truly like a, it's a different archetype of an agency.

And I would like to talk with you a little bit about like, as you hear brands that come to you and you're, you know, aware and they're saying, Hey, our audience, our consumers are asking for transparency. We really want to align with the right. Cause like, what are some of the best practices today that a brand can do to really nail this?

Because I think that, as I said, at the beginning, like our brands in our space, they have the absolute best intention they want to do right, but they're also feeling a little like afraid that no matter what they do, it's going to be a misstep. So what are some best practices that you're seeing today, like August of 2020?

Chris: You know, really, it's interesting because you know, brands are hearing this from their consumers and it's a really, you know, strong message that they need their brands to stand up for something, but I think a lot of brands are also understanding that they too have an impact and they need to clean up their act because you know, brands make stuff.

And so they also feel a responsibility to take some action as well. So it's a marketing opportunity for brands, but it's also, they're doing it because it's the right thing to do. And you can kind of see this blending of the right thing to do and consumers are asking for it. And it's a really powerful mixture of, of impact especially on the sustainability side. So I think, you know, to really approach this, you know, correctly and create that emotional connection with consumers, brands need to really stand for a singular issue that fits their company's ethos and their product mix, you know, and I would suggest that brands don't get spread too thin because there's so many opportunities that come to brands and sponsorships and this and that, but they really need to kind of sit there, like set their path forward and pick a lane and go for it and really dedicating all of their resources to really solving that problem.

But in the meantime, they've got to do the research. There's so many companies that just kind of jump in and say, look, we stand for this. And they haven't really done the research to really understand, how are we going to make the impact that we need to make? And I think that's the difference between what makes a really, what makes a good social impact platform and a great one is that they've done the research. They've talked to the community leaders, they've talked to the NGOs who are on the front lines and said, look, how are we going to get into this in the most intelligent and thoughtful way? And then they create that impact that platform that is focused on real impact. But I think that the next step that they need to take is they need to figure out how are we going to engage our consumers in this journey with us and our employees, and to really

make it a brand ethos and a mantra almost throughout the company. So consumers needed to kind of buy into this belief system and sort of the employees, and it helps with retention employee retention. It helps with hiring, but you know, when consumers are engaged like I said earlier, they want to have a piece of this. And when you can really kind of give them the tools to kind of be advocates and activists, then I think that's what really makes an incredibly powerful platform.

Kristin: So tell me this, with the brands that you've worked with in this, and also being on the nonprofit side, you're such a great resource. How have you seen, I mean, in my experience, and I'd love to hear yours, that when a brand looks internally to help define this, that's when we really see the magic happen is when the workforce is working with the leaders of the company to actually select the lane.

Chris: Yes, absolutely. You know, it can't be done from it. You can't do it for the press release. You know, you've got to look internally, you know what I mean? ...But some companies do, they, you know, they kind of go for the next shiny thing, the issue out there, but you know, really quickly, I think a lot of companies find out that they really should have listened to employees and they really should have dug deep into why was this company founded? What are the core values of this company? How do the employees feel about it and talk to as many people as you can before you pick that lane? Cause it really does pay off.

Kristin: Oh, absolutely. And as I know, a lot of people know, your employees are your best marketers period. The end, when they believe in, in, you know, what you're doing and what your company stands for. And it's super clear that as you said, it not only attracts the right people, but it also helps the people internally feel proud about where they're spending so much of their time. And I think everybody is experiencing this, but people, I don't care how old you are because everybody loves to point to Gen Z or millennials. But I think everybody going through COVID is reevaluating.

I'm spending a lot of time at work. Is this fulfilling for me? Or perhaps they've been furloughed or laid off or whatever. And they have time to really think about that. But think about when this job market comes back and think about how important it will be, that your brand actually has done the work to truly encase the cause into its DNA and actually like start showing action and talking and showing that act action.

Instead of like talking about it in a press release, make it a story. It's an experience that everybody at your company is going through. And I love that you say like, it's almost like you're saying embed with the community around the cause, because that's ultimately, I think where you're going to learn the most and what the employees would get the most like juice out of, you know, like just knowing that they're, they're in it, they're embedded with the people in Washington, or regionally, whatever they are embedded with the cause.

And you know, we've worked with multiple brands where we've seen this and it's been incredibly powerful and the communication around it almost writes itself and, and creates content for itself because everybody is so proud to be part of it.

Chris: I think you're totally right. And I think that you know, consumers now are very, very smart and they can...they understand when a company is trying to truly make an impact and when they're not. And when they see a company approaching a problem in a very thoughtful and strategic way, when they've done their homework to find out what do we really stand for? And once we figure that out, let's figure out how we're going to communicate it. Is it going to be, you know, we're going to engage all of our employees, our board, it's going to reflect that our product mix is going to reflect this new ethos, our retail stores, when someone walks into a retail store, they're going to understand, they're going to see it.

Patagonia obviously does a great job of that. But then, you know, and their brand marketing...I truly think that brand marketing and social impact should be one in the same, you know, if you're really gonna make an impact. And if you want your brand to stand for that, then you've got to communicate that authentically through storytelling and giving your consumers the tools to better understand the issue, but also come along for that journey with you. And, you know, again, Patagonia does this really well. But I I'm a firm believer that brand marketing and social impact should be one in the same.

Kristin: And when I just want to remind everybody, or this might put some folks at ease who are listening here today, it is a process. And, you know, Chris specifically said, bring them along the journey. The storytelling can be good, bad, and ugly. And I also think a lot of brands who were, you know, really paying close attention, not only to what their internal workforce is needing during COVID and how they were communicating and whatnot with them, no matter where they were.

As, you know, newly, newly virtual, et cetera, we did learn, I think, that selling is secondary to serving. And this brand storytelling that Chris is talking about is part of the serving. So going through COVID that, you know, we talked a lot about how it's not about transaction, it's about service right now, and now take that same page out of the playbook and I think you can actually build that into a marketing plan around cause or social impact, same thing in my mind, like that's kind of what we're talking about here is, is making your brand a vehicle for positive change like that storytelling has to be before, during and after and it has to include wins and losses in order to truly humanize the brand.

So I feel like that's what people will join up with. They aren't going to join up with a logo. They're going to join up with people who are doing the work and who are making the impact, even if it's incremental, they're in there trying to make it happen.

Chris: Absolutely. And you know, this is what, when we talked about that emotional connection, this is how we create it. You know, when we, when employees see their CEO in Washington, testifying at a hearing, they feel this level of pride that and consumers do to that, you know, is really unshakable. When you talk about brand marketing.

Kristin: And you also said something in our rehearsal call that I want to make sure we bring up

here, the pandemic has taught us that the best things in life are not things. What is most important to me? So let's talk a little bit about that because I think that's also something that people are like, okay, I can choose where I spend my money, right? It's not just about acquiring a new piece of gear or a widget of some kind. It is about what I believe the world should look like. So talk a little bit about that.

Chris: Well, I think as scary as COVID has been, you know, it is made it more imperative for companies to show what they stand for because consumers are just, in the last five months, it seems they're so much more hyper aware of their place in the world. And they are very aware of what drives brands, just beyond making stuff. You know, they understand that, life is fragile and if they're going to spend their time doing something, then it better be worth it. If they're going to spend their money on something, it better be worth it. And you know, they look at brands and they say, you know, okay, before I buy this brand, how do they treat their employees? You know, what are their products made of, you know, what do they really stand for? And I, I honestly think that COVID has changed the mindset of consumers a little bit and will continue to do so, because we're just more hyper aware of the fragility of this whole thing.

Kristin: I think it's more than a little bit, but yes, I think you're absolutely right. So we're also before wrap up today, I wanted to talk about some case studies, but before we do that, can we talk about one of your clients, Western resource advocates, because they overlay with one of my fantastic clients, Scarpa North America.

Chris: Sure. So Western Resource Advocates is a nonprofit that I worked with here in Boulder that does amazing environmental work in the inner mountain West on clean air, clean energy, fresh water and public lands. And we're working with Scarpa among other brands. And Kim Miller actually was the architect of this platform that we've created called Protect the West. And it's really a platform for brands in the outdoor industry to kind of come together and collaborate and elevate their voice on these existential issues that face the west like clean air, clean water and everything that we care about that drives our industry forward that are so important to us.

Kristin: And Kim is the CEO of Scarpa North America and just a fantastic Verde client and a friend of mine. And I know this work is so, so important to him that, and he's also really risen to the occasion around BIPOC and diversity, equity and inclusion. That's obviously a passion point for them, but the work with Western Resource Advocates can be found in the show notes. We'll send some links. Let's talk about a couple other case studies.

Chris: Sure. when you look at cause marketing and social impact, Ben and Jerry's really holds the bar, you know, they have a team of people that are dedicated to their cause, but obviously their causes their brand. And you know, this team at Ben and Jerry's has worked for nonprofits, they've worked on Capitol Hill and they really do understand the issues, the important issues that are of today. And so their work, it goes back years. It's just amazing. But their work recently on Black Lives Matter was just so impactful because there were so many companies that came out with statements and great statements about diversity and Black Lives Matter and the whole movement. But Ben and Jerry's took it one step further and they came out with their statement, but they

also came out with a set of action steps to say, look, if we're going to solve this, this is what needs to happen. And it kind of goes back to, you know, it was just so powerful. And I think everybody saw it and said, Oh my God, that's just so amazing. But it goes back to what we were talking about earlier. It was like, you know, people want to know, not just that you care, but what you're doing and they want to come along for the ride. And I think Ben and Jerry's created that roadmap for people.

Kristin: Absolutely. And they don't slow down. They keep raising the bar, which is incredible. Especially during a time like this, when we don't have a blueprint, but when we have brands like that to see what they're doing, it's fantastic. So you have another case study that you wanted to share as well?

Chris: Oh sure. Just very quickly. I, you know, one of the brands out here in the West is called Bank of the West and, you know, they took a really tough stand on climate change, but they, they realized that climate change was their lane and they, they chose it and they got behind it a hundred percent. And what did was that they said, look, we're a bank. How can we make an impact on this issue? And that's something I think that companies really need to take a look at as well. It's like, look, we are a company that produces this.

How can we make an impact on this issue? And Bank of the West looked at climate change and they said, look, what we're going to do is we're not going to finance any fossil fuel related projects going forward. And that's a really tough stand to make, especially for a company that does business in Wyoming and Montana, but they did it. And it's really relevant to people because when you were, I make a deposit in a bank, you know, our, you know, so many banks take that money and they did, and they finance other projects with it that we don't know about. And Bank of the West said, look, we're not going to do that. And it was a really amazing stand in something that was very, very bold. I respect,

Kristin: I have a lot of respect to that too and I think one of the markers of that one is that we know as consumers, we have an experience with a bank and we're looking at that and we're like, that is actually really towing the line. That's putting action.

And, and you know, that they're turning away business because of that commitment, but they're gaining business from fans and followers who aligned from that. So I feel like that's an exceptionally great example. So thank you for sharing that.

Chris: Social impact isn't, you know, can be very, can be very, kind of like uncomfortable in many ways. You know, when you pick that lane, not everyone's going to love it. You know, there's always going to be somebody on your social media that says something, but I would just say that I've seen it happen so many times where, you know, brands say, look, this is what we care about and we're gonna, we're gonna keep moving forward and it does pay off, you know, your commitment shows.

Kristin: Absolutely. Before we wrap up here, I think it's important that we also revisit again, because you have the great background, you deal with advertising nonprofits. And now with baselayer, let's talk about how companies can ask the right questions when

supporting a nonprofit and truly do a good job, integrating that nonprofit into their storytelling.

Chris: Sure. so really quickly I've seen this firsthand, you know, and so many companies, you know, they have the best intentions, but they don't ask the right questions when they support a nonprofit, you know, the funding is great and so desperately need it. But the real question should be when a company comes on and wants to support a nonprofit, they should say, how can we help you? How can we best help drive your mission forward?

Because that's what people at nonprofits love to hear because companies have so many resources that nonprofits don't such as marketing support, you know, social media advertising. Can you join a company at an event? You know, creating content, you know, visibility in retail stores, access to consumers, and obviously pro athletes. What we did really well at Protect Our Winters was, you know, we were leveraging the voice of pro athletes and brands helped us with that. So there are so many assets that companies have that nonprofits could use to really accelerate their mission.

Kristin: And I have to say has done a great job with this to keep your eyes on Scapra North America going into the fall. There's some pretty cool programming that they're launching around DEI and Black Lives Matter that they've incorporated their athletes into. That's fantastic. So this is no longer the era of like, I support this nonprofit and I get a PDF of, you know, a logo and different things I can put here on a hang tag. It is much more multichannel than that. And I think there are ways to bring this to life through video and visual assets live streams. Like these are fun, you know, great engaging things that you can, you can take, you know, your athletes or ambassadors and put them into the mix and really get the word out in a creative way. That is all story-driven across different channels.

So I just invite everybody to look at all of the channels that you sell product through and push content through and consider what is the overlay of my commitment to this cause to this social impact. Cause, and these are the nonprofits I'm supporting, how do I bring them into this on a regular basis, across multiple channels in a way that really brings it to life. That to me is really the future of this. And it's what you're, I think that's how consumers need to see you do this in order to truly understand your level of commitment and the action that your brand is taking.

Chris: That's really the special sauce. You know, when, when when a company can really sit down with a nonprofit and, and trade those ideas and get their marketing teams involved, it works for the nonprofit, but it also really works for the brand.

Kristin: Yep, absolutely. Well, on that note, Chris, I have to say thank you so much. I'd love to have you back to give us an update as we continue to go through the rest of this pandemic and the recovery and everything else that's happening in 2020, that's super important from a transformation standpoint, very, very important.

And it's wonderful to have you on, I've wanted to have you on the podcast for a while now. So thank you for taking the time. This has been absolutely fantastic.

Chris: Thanks Kristin. And it was great. I really enjoyed it. I appreciate it.

Kristin: All right. More to come soon, everybody. Thanks.