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USC Annenberg School of Communications

Comprehensive Exam

EARNED

La-Z-Boy - Gaming Chair Campaign

Thought-Leadership Piece (Fast Company or Forbes)

**Comfort Without Conscience isn't Comfort: Why Environmental Transparency Matters in
the Furniture Industry**

When La-Z-Boy's founders, Edward Knabusch and Edwin Shoemaker, accepted meat, corn, and cows as payment during the Great Depression, they showcased a resourcefulness born out of necessity rather than convenience. As the CEO of La-Z-Boy, I often reflect on that story. Our company was built on the principle of making the most of what you have and wasting nothing, while still finding the strength to endure. Nearly a hundred years later, I would argue that this same instinct is exactly what the furniture industry needs today—not merely as a survival strategy, but as a moral imperative for our planet. This leads me back to a question I continually ask myself: What are the consequences of over a century of comfort for our environment?

The furniture industry's lack of environmental transparency—marked by complex supply chains, opaque sourcing, and unsold products ending up in landfills—has eroded consumer trust. Tackling these issues is a shared responsibility that requires accountability from all parties involved, not just one organization.

At La-Z-Boy, we have made commitments as an organization that we are proud of: we have set science-based emissions targets, established a net-zero goal by 2050, and arranged a Virtual Power Purchase Agreement that covers more than 90 percent of our U.S. energy

consumption (La-Z-Boy, 2025). While these are significant steps, many industry leaders are still developing their sustainability strategies. We believe that transparently sharing our progress and challenges can inspire others and foster a collective movement toward environmental responsibility.

However, it would be wrong to regard these achievements as a stopping point. As an industry, we often discuss the importance of having the courage to cultivate culture and design, and of compassion for the planet. Yet, at the end of the day, courage should not just be a part of our mission statement; it should be evident in our decisions, especially the costly ones.

Science-based emissions targets should become the standard in our industry, not the exception. Supply chain transparency should be an expectation of every retailer and a demand of consumers willing to support brands committed to verified sustainability practices. By making sustainability a core value, we can shape consumer expectations and encourage more responsible purchasing decisions.

La-Z-Boy will celebrate its 100th anniversary in 2027. I have mentioned before that I want my legacy to be more than just a title; I want to build something loyal and lasting that extends well beyond my tenure. This is not just a personal ambition; it is the only way I believe a company can earn another hundred years.

Comfort should not come at someone else's expense—not the communities near a polluting factory, the forests cleared to fill a warehouse, or the generations that will inherit whatever decisions we make or avoid making today. Our founders famously accepted cows as payment to keep this company alive. The least we can do is ensure that the company they built is worth preserving. The world can wait; this planet cannot.

Strategy Note: This thought leadership piece, meant to be written by Melinda Whittington, CEO, and published in either Fast Company or Forbes, aligns with La-Z-Boy's core principles of high-quality design and comfort while emphasizing the furniture industry's impact on environmental sustainability. This ESG topic is highly relevant to La-Z-Boy's initiatives, as the company takes a broad stance against the furniture industry's negative environmental impact and has made several environmental commitments. This gives Whittington credibility to speak authoritatively on these issues, echoing the company's public stance on the topic. Additionally, by tying the story to the brand's 100th anniversary, her piece helps celebrate their history while looking towards the future and the positive impact they can have on the industry.