

# The Journal of Values-Based Leadership

---

Manuscript 1533

---

## Patagonia: An Update

JVBL Staff

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholar.valpo.edu/jvbl>



Part of the [Business Commons](#)

---

This Editorial is brought to you for free and open access by the College of Business at ValpoScholar. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Journal of Values-Based Leadership by an authorized administrator of ValpoScholar. For more information, please contact a ValpoScholar staff member at [scholar@valpo.edu](mailto:scholar@valpo.edu).

# Patagonia

## *An Update*



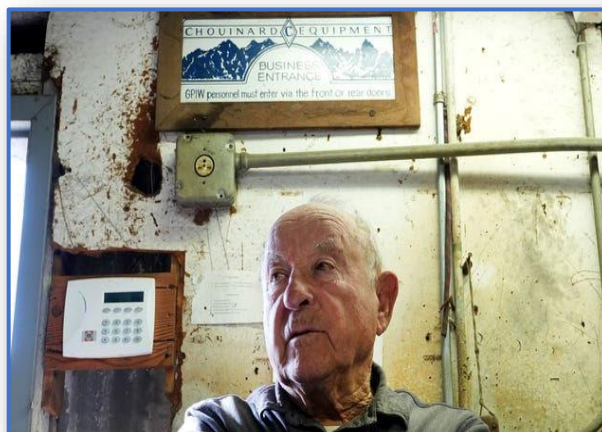
— VENTURA, CALIFORNIA, USA

Three years ago, a *JVBL* editor penned a case study concerning the clothing wear giant, Patagonia. In “*Five Lessons from Patagonia, a Successful Company with a Conscience*” (Eich, 2021), author Ritch K. Eich of Thousand Oaks, California wrote:

*On a quiet street at the north end of Downtown Ventura, California, is a store that sells much more than high-end outdoor clothing and gear. Patagonia, named for the environmentally-rich region in South America, also pushes an idea: that minimizing humankind’s footprint on the planet is a business as important as buying a well-made warm jacket for a trip to the Arctic. Patagonia is one of the world’s most innovative and environmentally-minded companies, and there’s a lot corporate America can learn – and model – from Patagonia’s way of doing business.*

In early 2024, columnist Woods, Wes, II of the *Ventura County Star*, provided a local update on the business, incorporating its history with its recent honors. From Woods’ “‘Heart of the business’: Patagonia’s humble blacksmith shop named Ventura landmark”:

*Patagonia’s climb to the heights of the outdoor gear realm is linked to a rustic shed in downtown Ventura. Now, the old blacksmith shop that played a key role in the company’s birth has been named a historic landmark in Ventura. The City Council approved the designation on Feb. 13. The “tin shed,” as the shop is also known, is located on a site at 235 W. Santa Clara Street in Ventura, California. It was originally used as Ventura’s first slaughterhouse — the “Hobson Bros. Packing Company”— established in the 1870s, according to the city’s report on the property. The old packing company structure, now the “Great Pacific Iron Works” building and Patagonia’s retail store, has previously been designated a local landmark. The blacksmith shop sits behind the Great Pacific Iron Works building. The tin shed’s original construction history isn’t known, but the structure appears in a 1945 aerial photograph.*



Yvon Chouinard, founder of Patagonia

Patagonia's founder, Yvon Chouinard, moved his mountain climbing gear business — then named Chouinard Equipment — to the shed in 1967. The company would eventually become Patagonia in 1973 and grow to be an outdoor apparel giant with more than 3,000 retail stores in the U.S.

Eich, in his 2021 piece, lauded the store's origins, development, and its commitment to a triple-bottom-line way of doing business. He also had a personal connection:

*Patagonia is a hometown company I know well. My family buys their merchandise mainly as gifts especially during the December holidays, knowing we are getting high-quality goods from a company with a conscience. One reason I find Patagonia so impressive and refreshing is this company, worth over \$1 billion, isn't shoving blatant consumerism on the customer. In fact, one of Patagonia's best moments was its unique ad campaign called "Don't Buy This Jacket." Patagonia promoted anti-consumerism outright and criticized over-consumption by telling its customers how much water and carbon dioxide was used to make a certain Patagonia jacket the company had for sale.*

Columnist Woods continues to explain the company's origins, especially with respect to its first edifice and local community importance:

*The shed's previous tenants were Bob Cooper Surf Boards and Morey Pope Surfboards.. 'I think it's great that the community recognizes it,' said Vincent Stanley, Patagonia's head of philosophy, who has been with the company since 1973. 'I think we all recognize it here as the heart of the business.' The shed is now part of Patagonia's headquarters campus.*

*The blacksmith shop has remained the same since the 1960s. The single-story structure, about 660 square feet in all, has corrugated steel siding and a gabled roof. The city report noted the utilitarian building's design doesn't fit any particular style. Inside, the shop has changed very little and contains many original pieces of equipment used to smith metal, including the coal-fired forge and an anvil Chouinard bought from a junkyard in 1957.*

*Chouinard and his business partner Tom Frost designed, smithed and manufactured outdoor equipment in the shed until the early 1970s, when aluminum became more commonly used to make new products. 'It anchors us to our location, it anchors us to our foundation,' said Val Franco, Patagonia's head of archives.*

*The historic designation places the blacksmith shop at No. 119 on the city's register of landmarks and points of interest. The Great Pacific Iron Works building is local landmark*

***We used to work long, long hours and get it over with, and then take off and go climbing or surfing," he recalled. "Even when I had four or five guys working here, the place would clean out every time the surf was up. ... That's been an HR policy. As long as the work gets done, I don't care when people work. — Yvon Chouinard***

No. 23. While the historic designation means a lot to some people, Chouinard downplayed the significance during a recent visit to the site. 'It means nothing to me,' he said with a laugh. 'It means everything to my wife (Malinda). My wife lives in the past. I couldn't care less about history.' Chouinard recalled how differently the two reacted when they had to evacuate during the Thomas Fire. "My wife spent all night loading up the car. I grabbed

*my passport and my bamboo flyrod, went back to sleep,” he said. “That’s basically it. Everything else, let it go.”*

*When the Ventura council voted unanimously to designate the building a historic landmark, Mayor Joe Schroeder spoke highly of Chouinard. ‘Yvon was a teenager when he started the company,’ Schroeder said. ‘He came from Burbank to Ventura. That was a good day for all of Ventura.’*

*Chouinard said he came to Ventura to be closer to the surf and mountain climbing. He briefly thought about moving to San Diego but decided against it. The last time he was in the shop working was last spring to make pot holders, he said.*

*Items in the blacksmith shop spurred memories for Chouinard. A 138-pound anvil was the first piece of equipment he purchased, Chouinard said. A hammer and grinder summoned the early days of the business. “We used to work long, long hours and get it over with, and then take off and go climbing or surfing,” he recalled. “Even when I had four or five guys working here, the place would clean out every time the surf was up. ... That’s been an HR policy. As long as the work gets done, I don’t care when people work.”*

*In September 2022, Chouinard made national headlines when he transferred ownership of the \$3 billion-dollar company to fight climate change. The international company, known for its progressive work culture and environmental activism, is now owned by the environmental nonprofit the Holdfast Collective and the Patagonia Purpose Trust.*

This transfer in 2022 to the Patagonia Purpose Trust follows the company’s fundamental tenets. Eich emphasized that Patagonia had aligned its operations with its mission statement and provided a clarion call to other businesses to so emulate:

*‘Make the best product, cause no unnecessary harm, and use business to inspire and implement solutions to the environmental crisis.’ Regardless of what type of business you have, a focus on value and safeguarding the environment should always be among the company’s top goals. This is also a message the public general supports. Many businesses have already taken steps to increase sustainability in their business practices and improve environmental stewardship. It’s time for all of corporate America and small businesses too to jump on board in a much stronger way and consider the environment an equal stakeholder in the business along with the buying public. No company can be 100 percent sustainable – Chouinard acknowledges this – but many can, and should, do much better. Chouinard said, ‘Who are businesses really responsible to? Their customers? Shareholders? Employees? We would argue that it’s none of the above. Fundamentally, businesses are responsible to their resource base. Without a healthy environment there are no shareholders, no employees, no customers and no business.’*

Chouinard and Patagonia demonstrate the saying, **“Doing well by doing good.”**

**Our gratitude all around.**

---

---

## References

- City of Ventura Community Development Staff Report (13 February 2024). *Historic Landmark Designation Request for the Patagonia Blacksmith Shop*. Available at <https://www.cityofventura.ca.gov/DocumentCenter/View/38989/08>
- Eich, Ritch (Summer/Fall 2021). Five Lessons from Patagonia, a Successful Company with a Conscience. *The Journal of Values-Based Leadership*. 14(2), Art. 15. Available at <https://scholar.valpo.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1372&context=jvbl>
- Woods, Wes, II. "Heart of the business": Patagonia's humble blacksmith shop named Ventura landmark. *VC Star*. <https://www.vcstar.com/story/news/2024/02/25/patagonias-humble-blacksmith-shop-named-ventura-landmark/72512640007/>