



**LEVELING**

**UP COMPANY**

**CLIMATE**

**ACTION**

**5 KEY INSIGHTS FROM  
THE 2023 TED COUNTDOWN  
SUMMIT IN DETROIT**



**FUTURE FORUM**



# HOW CAN BUSINESS LEADERS ACCELERATE SOLUTIONS TO THE CLIMATE CRISIS?

We know that Earth’s climate is changing. We know which solutions have the potential to reverse the climate crisis. And we know that we need to take bold action today. But currently, climate solutions are not being implemented at the speed and scale required. What is keeping us from implementing these solutions, and how can we overcome these barriers?

Working together to answer this question was at the heart of the [2023 TED Countdown Summit](#) in Detroit. Over 750 global innovators, business leaders, scientists, policymakers, artists, activists and more gathered to discuss climate solutions that can be scaled, borrowed and reinterpreted to get the world to net zero greenhouse gas emissions as well as how to cultivate the bold, courageous leadership required to address the climate challenge.

**“We cannot tackle climate change without wholehearted engagement from business.”**

**— Lindsay Levin, Head of Partnerships and Impact, TED**

Businesses have a crucial role to play in this transition, and it will require both unprecedented coordination and ambitious action from all sectors. Programming at the TED Countdown Summit sought to help companies step up their climate ambition to help transform the global economy. Here, we share five key takeaways for businesses, distilled from the collective wisdom of trailblazers and innovators at the Summit. Each is an opportunity to explore how your company can develop bold climate solutions, and how you can catalyze these efforts as a business leader. Learn how companies are efficiently transitioning their products to zero carbon, developing sustainable business opportunities, sparking momentum toward solutions and sharing their success stories to inspire others – while also being candid about barriers to progress.

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# 1. FOCUS ON EXPONENTIAL PROGRESS

Dr. Jonathan Foley, executive director at Project Drawdown, kicked off his TED Talk with a big question: When it comes to climate action, “How do we figure out what works, what doesn’t, and where we should focus?”

Despite a growing number of [commitments to net zero targets](#), progress towards 2030 climate goals remains [too slow](#), warned [Simon Stiell](#), Executive Secretary of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). But Stiell also believes we are on the verge of a green revolution tipping point, where climate action shifts into an era of exponential change.

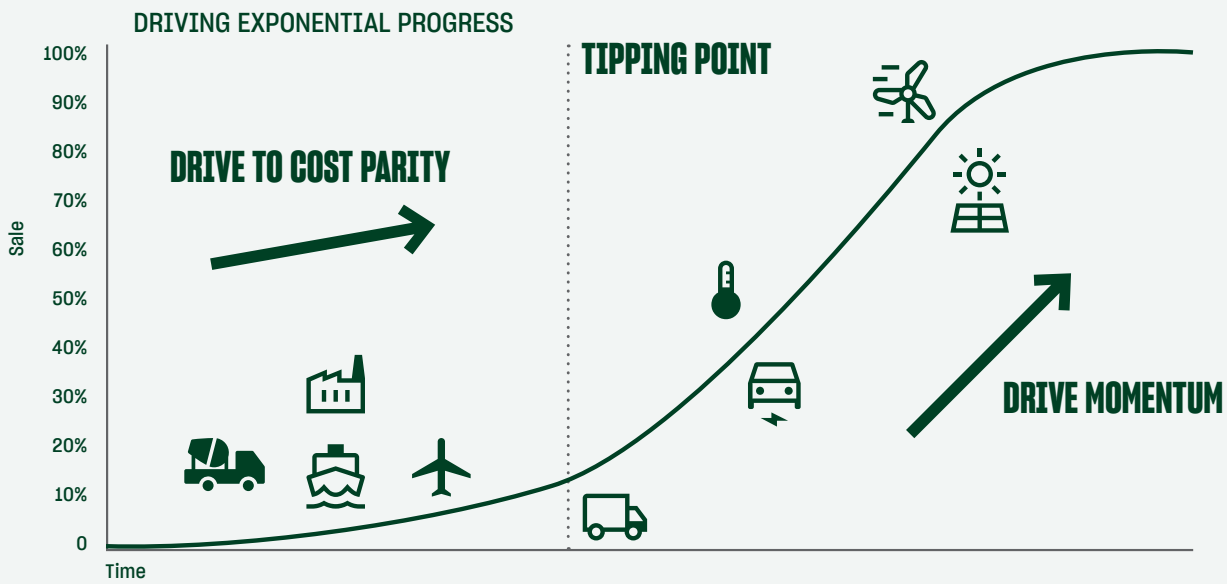
What drives exponential progress? During a workshop at the TED Countdown Summit, UK Climate Change High Level Champion to COP26 Nigel Topping and Kelly Levin of the Systems Change Lab encouraged participants to shift from a linear to exponential mindset. We tend to think that change happens at the same pace it has in the past,

## KEY QUESTIONS FOR COMPANY LEADERSHIP

Which climate solutions are ready to be scaled through investment, infrastructure or technology?

How can you test solutions with greater speed and fewer resources?

but often, it happens much quicker. This was true for the adoption of cars, oil pipelines, electric power and even the flush toilet. Scientists have identified [a portfolio of climate solutions](#) that will successfully get us to net zero. Unfortunately, business, government and philanthropic investments are not yet aligned with science. Business leaders should focus on building an effective and efficient solutions portfolio *and* encourage their teams to adopt an exponential mindset to accelerate action.



## How can businesses make exponential progress?

### IMPLEMENT QUICK WINS TODAY

As companies develop their roadmap, the most important variable is time. Emissions cuts made today are more valuable than cuts in future — the longer we wait, the less effective an action is. And, early investments have bigger payoffs in the long run. Ready-to-deploy [“Emergency Brake Solutions”](#) solutions that are implemented immediately and at scale can result in deep emissions cuts.

### DEPLOY PROVEN SOLUTIONS

It is vital that industries prioritize the deployment of existing and proven decarbonization strategies while they develop new technologies required to achieve net zero. When asked why Maersk decided to go all-in on green methanol when there are many potential green fuel options, A.P. Moller-Maersk SVP Morten Bo Christiansen responded plainly, “it works, and it works now.” When faced with the problem of how to store heat energy for industrial processes, CEO and Founder of RONDO, John O’Donnell, and his team prioritized existing, durable materials and simple designs that could be

deployed now. "If you want to go to scale fast, it's good to be boring."

## Emissions cuts made today are more valuable than cuts in future – the longer we wait, the less effective an action is.

### **BEND THE CURVE**

Leaders should first focus on driving cost parity through rapid innovation, developing and scaling up new solutions, creating demand, and garnering policy support so that solutions are primed for exponential growth. After the tipping point, focus on driving momentum through investment, infrastructure, and shifting systems away from their support of old tech.

### **CONSERVE RESOURCES WITH CREATIVE THINKING**

Siemens has accelerated research and development of new climate solutions using digital twin technology, said Cedrik Neike, CEO of Siemens Digital. They first "build" solutions in the digital world, where failure is less consequential and new ideas can be tested quickly and without physical resources. They are making unprecedented progress on a range of projects – from developing fast-charging batteries and electric aircraft, to optimizing city planning.

### **PROTECT NATURAL CARBON SINKS**

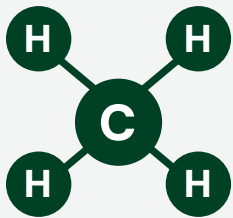
Nature is the only proven carbon capture technology operating at scale today, making it essential to protecting and restoring Comment end ecosystems. Many businesses can support regenerative agriculture and sustainable forestry within their operations and value chain. For example, TED Speaker Louise Mabulo's organization, The Cacao Project, is working with farmers in the Philippines to deploy regenerative and adaptive practices rooted in Indigenous knowledge, which is unlocking agricultural productivity.

## SOLUTION SPOTLIGHT

# Pulling the emergency brake on methane

About [30% of observed global warming to date has been caused by methane](#), which is both more powerful and shorter-lived than carbon dioxide. “Mitigating methane is the fastest, most efficient way to reduce temperature within our lifetime,” said Global Methane Hub CEO Marcelo Mena during his TED Talk.

[Human-caused methane](#) is largely emitted from fossil fuel production and use (35%), agriculture (40%), and waste (20%). Many [solutions to curb methane exist today](#) and are ready for implementation, including eliminating methane leaks from fossil fuel production sites, cutting food waste and implementing alternative livestock manure management practices.



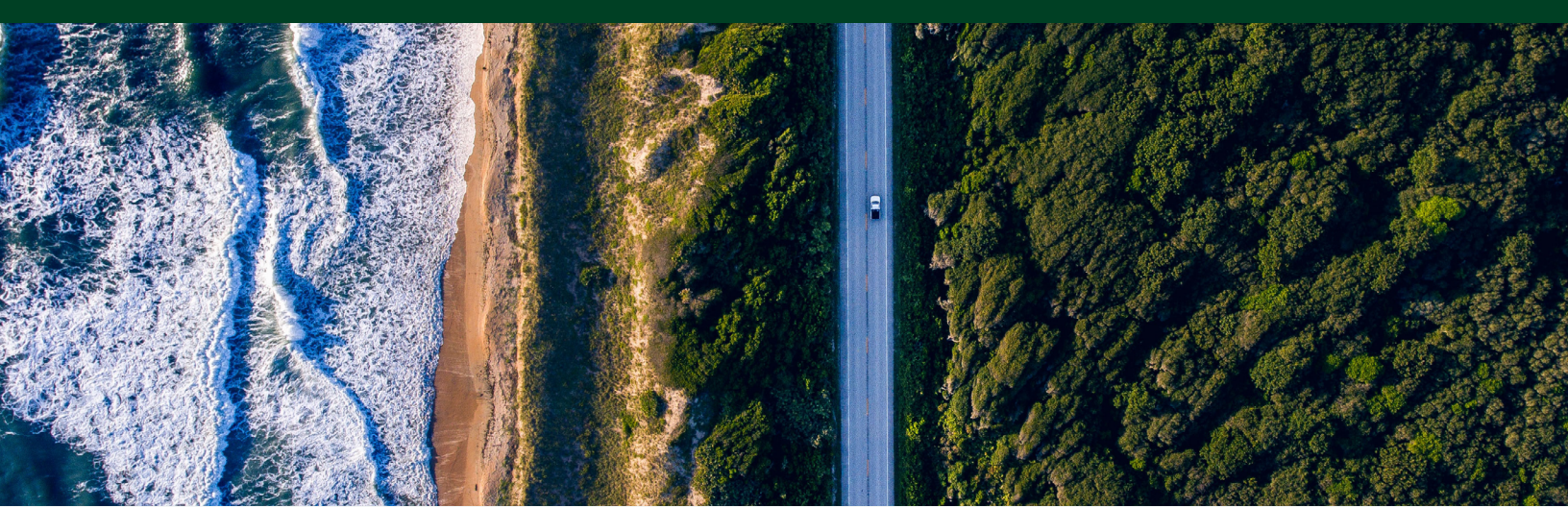
Though shorter-lived, methane is more than 25 times as potent as carbon dioxide at trapping heat in the atmosphere over a 100 year period.

During a solutions workshop, CEO of [Tradewater](#) Tim Brown shared how his organization has eliminated 6.7 million metric tons of CO<sub>2</sub>e with perseverance and simple solutions. Tradewater plugs orphaned oil and gas wells preventing the release of methane, greenhouse gas emissions that are easily prevented, but unregulated.

Marcelo Mena also highlighted the importance of prioritizing human wellbeing when assessing solutions. “It’s a development challenge. As poor countries get richer, their demand for food and consumer goods will increase, and so will the waste they generate,” noting that developing countries’ emissions are expected to increase significantly by 2050 on their current trajectory.

Despite the urgency and opportunity around methane, [funding for abatement measures is just 2% of the total flow of climate finance](#). FullCycle Partner Stephan Nicoleau shared his vision for building an acceleration ecosystem to scale commercially-ready technology that provides at least a gigaton per year of CO<sub>2</sub>e abatement. After applying their rigorous analysis on available financial opportunities, they made their first investment in a technology that reduces methane from waste.

Stephan believes private and public sector collaboration is the key to driving more private sector investment toward methane solutions. Marcelo’s team recently received funding to help foster collaboration between policymakers, the private sector, and finance on best practices via [The Waste Methane Assessment Platform](#). The platform will draw on existing data sets to prioritize interventions and deploy targeted resources.



## 2. CULTIVATE UNPRECEDENTED COLLABORATION

Some of the knottiest climate problems we face are issues no company can solve on their own. How will the shipping and aviation industries move to renewable fuels that do not yet exist at scale? How can we create cement — the world’s most prevalent building material — without greenhouse gas emissions? What is a car manufacturer’s role in climate action if their most significant emissions are released when customers operate their vehicles? Solving problems of this magnitude requires unprecedented collaboration across sectors and the value chain.

What holds companies back from launching bold new collaborations? Siemens and Northvolt Chairman and TFF Chairman Jim Hagemann Snabe says it comes down to radical leadership—leaders that have the courage to reinvent their value chains because it is necessary, even if it doesn’t seem possible today. In his experience, not knowing exactly how a company will reach big goals is okay, if the challenge ultimately sparks innovation and massive collaboration around solutions.

### KEY QUESTIONS FOR COMPANY LEADERSHIP

Which climate solutions have been piloted by your company or other similar organizations?

Which of those solutions are ready to be scaled through investment, infrastructure or technology?

How can you focus suppliers on climate priorities, and utilize competition to drive innovation?



# How can partnerships accelerate private sector climate action?

## SCALING DEMAND FOR LOW-CARBON GOODS

Although every company wants to be seen as **the** leader in their sector, we will lose the climate fight if entire sectors do not transform, said Nestlé Global Head of Public Affairs and ESG Engagement Rob Cameron. Companies cannot “win” going it alone. Rob noted that during the Countdown Summit, he reflected more deeply on the opportunity for companies in the same sector to come together and create demand for goods from suppliers who implement net zero practices — partnerships that could quickly transform whole industries.

## DEVELOPING NEW TECHNOLOGIES

Cement production is a hard-to-abate sector responsible for 7% of global greenhouse gas emissions. Cemex Director of Sustainability Vicente Saiso Alva shared that as they began to imagine a new climate-aligned cement sector, they created an open collaboration platform via Cemex Ventures to help them identify and invest in new technologies via collaborations with startups, academics, other industries and companies along their supply chain.

## DE-RISKING TRANSITION

Transitioning to new green technologies can be expensive and risky, with long-range returns. That’s why the US government’s new Energy Earthshots Initiative was modeled after the Moonshot initiative that sent astronauts to the moon, Dr. Asmeret Asefaw Berhe, Director of the Office of Science at the US Department of Energy, shared in her TED Talk. “The nation needed to establish a new expansive ecosystem of innovation ... it required an all-hands-on-deck approach that included government, educators, the private sector, industry, and of course, scientists and engineers.” Their public-private partnership de-risks private sector investment through government incentives for collaboration, innovative policy and regulation, and investment in building STEM expertise.

## SOLUTION SPOTLIGHT

# Developing alliances for climate innovation and sector transformation

Global shipping represents 3% of total carbon emissions (which is greater than the total emissions of most countries), and 80% of global trade volume.

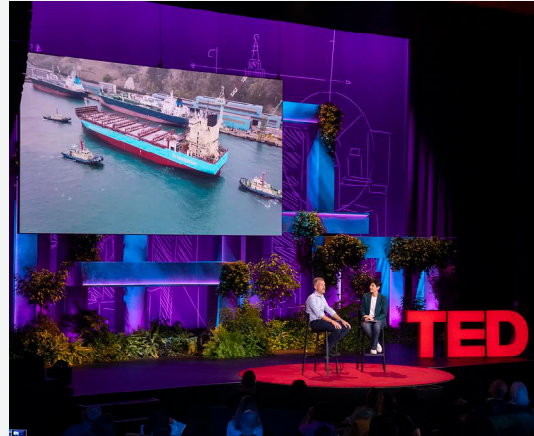
Decarbonizing this hard-to-abate sector, which relies on oil-derived bunker fuels, will require green alternatives, many of which are not yet available at scale or commercially viable.

Shipping company Maersk knew that their own company's ability to achieve their climate goals would depend on wholesale transformation of global shipping and logistics, while recognizing that customers across the world depend on shipping to receive essential goods. To create viable and efficient solutions, it was clear that ship builders and operators, ports, fuel providers, and end users would need to come together to envision a new future. Competitors would need to sit side-by-side.

**“No country, no company, no matter how large, can do this alone.”**

**—Bo Cerup-Simonsen,  
Mærsk Mc-Kinney Møller Center**

In 2020, a grant from the A.P. Moller Foundation enabled the creation of the nonprofit Mærsk Mc-Kinney Møller Center for Zero Carbon Shipping, which is focused on decarbonizing the maritime industry. The Center convenes key actors across the supply chain and fosters



collaboration to quickly overcome technological, commercial and regulatory challenges. It also identified a number of “green corridors” with guidelines so that each stakeholder group can see the path towards end-to-end zero carbon shipping.

The impact is measurable. A.P. Moller-Maersk SVP Morten Bo Christiansen shared that just three years ago there were no orders for ships that sail on renewable green methanol. But through partnerships, they are seeing exponential change — Maersk ordered the first green methanol ship two years ago. In 2022, there were 23 on order. Today, 120 ships are on order with all five major container carriers participating. He emphasized that by partnering across the value chain, they've been able to de-risk key investments.

TED speaker and Ørsted SVP Olivia Breese highlighted how unprecedented collaboration across the industry can unlock broader business transformation. A 2022 commitment from Maersk to purchase green methanol has enabled the company to expand and invest in their green methanol production business line.



### 3. IDENTIFY AND RESPOND TO LOCAL PRIORITIES

Founder of Black Bottom Ventures, James Feagin, has been building a business innovation ecosystem in Detroit by investing in entrepreneurs on what he calls, “the receiving end of capitalism.” Take CEO of BSG Tire Recycling’s Ethan Dunn. When a pile of tires was dumped in Ethan’s yard and he learned that there was no safe way to dispose of or recycle them in Detroit, he was inspired to start his own business cleaning up the city, building a circular economy, and creating new employment pathways.

**“Climate change exacerbates and compounds economic inequity in our city.”**

**– Anika Goss, CEO, Detroit Future City**

Feagin’s investment theory for Black Bottom Ventures is that if you seek on-the-ground perspectives, you’ll find the actual problems that need to be solved via the green economy. And with a little support, these entrepreneurs’ impactful ideas can be accelerated to build scalable businesses, fuel wealth creation and spur economic mobility across entire cities and regions.

# KEY QUESTIONS FOR COMPANY LEADERSHIP

As your business transitions to a net zero economy, which communities might be impacted by new environmental externalities or economic transitions?

How can your company anticipate and help to alleviate the negative impacts of the transition?

Are there opportunities for cost savings or new business if your company takes greater responsibility for what happens to your products during the use and disposal phases?

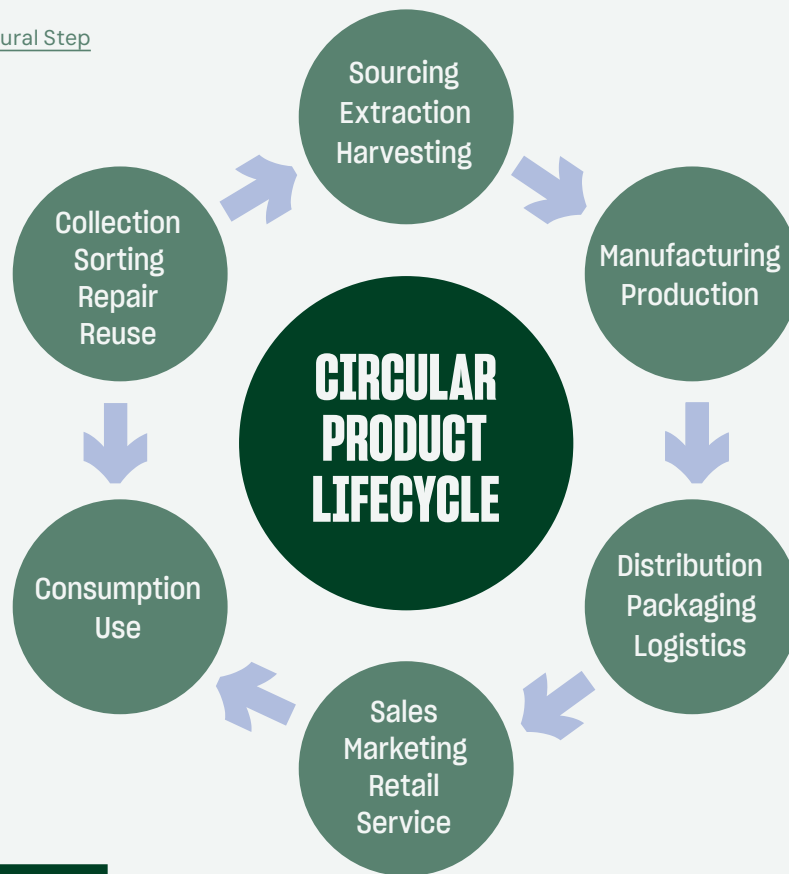
The importance of rooting climate solutions in the realities that communities face and evolving with local conditions was apparent at the TED Countdown Summit. CEO of Detroit Future City Anika Goss drove the point home in her [TED Talk](#), “Climate change exacerbates and compounds economic inequity in our city.” During a workshop, participants explored biomimicry principles and opportunities to make their businesses more locally attuned and responsive. They discussed how business leaders can understand broader stakeholder value that can be generated by their climate efforts by tuning into local conditions. “You have to create value for all, or you cannot continue to deliver value for your shareholders,” noted Nestlé’s Rob Cameron.

## How can companies create climate action plans that are locally attuned and responsive?

### MUTUALITY

When building coalitions, spend time understanding stakeholder priorities. Approach coalition partners with humility, and allow them to define your role in helping them meet their goals.

Adapted from [The Natural Step](#)



## CIRCULAR MINDSET

Many companies explore circular solutions within their product lines, but fewer take responsibility for the full lifecycle of their products. Embracing [circular thinking](#) means understanding the social and environmental impacts of business decisions across the value chain: sourcing, design, manufacturing, product use *and* end of life. For example, Cemex is exploring opportunities in construction and demolition waste, which represents [more than one third of waste sent to landfill](#). "Demolition waste could be sorted, processed and transformed into recycled aggregates or organic material to restore quarries," explained Juan Carlos Herrera, Head of Global Urbanization Solutions.

## HOLISTIC RISK ASSESSMENT

As you transition to new products and processes, could unintended consequences arise? Try to anticipate new challenges for the communities in which you operate and discuss trade-offs transparently. Union organizer Payton Wilkins shared how he has worked with unions to help protect union workers' jobs when fossil fuel energy jobs disappear. "I want them to realize they don't have to choose between making a living and living in a safe and healthy environment. They can have both. Hell, they deserve both."

## SOLUTION SPOTLIGHT

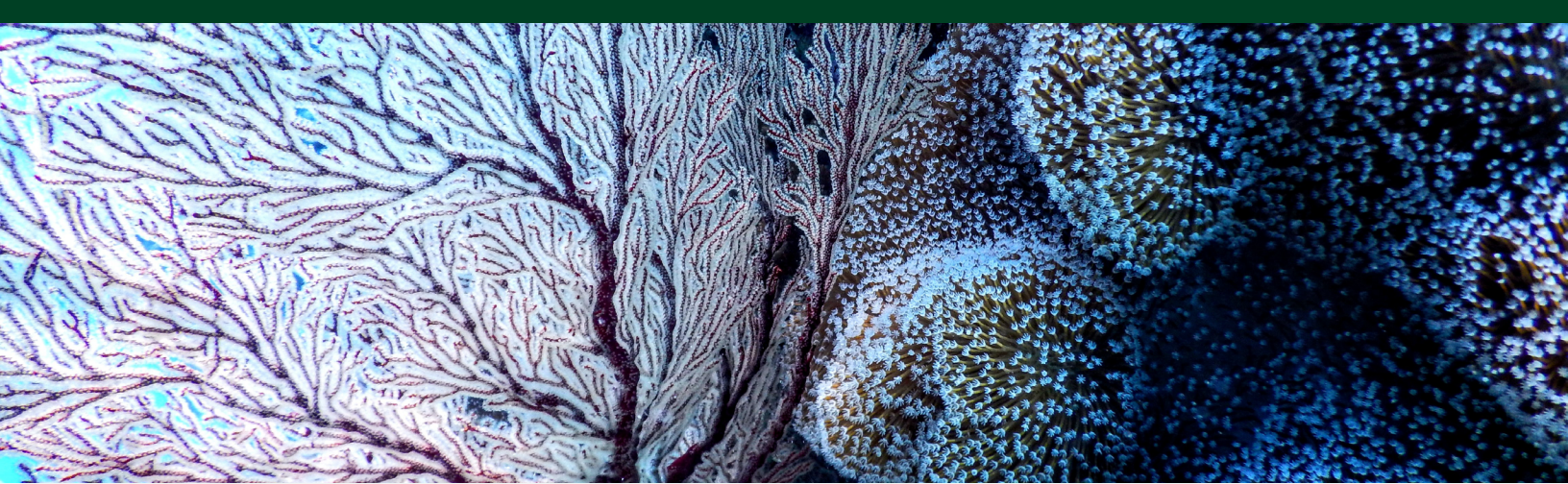
# Accelerating solutions through entrepreneurship ecosystems

One way companies can tap into localized knowledge and innovation is by fostering innovation along their value chain, where they hold incredible influence. Leading the way with suppliers and partners can create a powerful ripple effect of decarbonization.

In 2018, AB InBev launched the [100+ accelerator program](#) to identify and support entrepreneurs who are committed to solving problems in their own communities. The program focuses on innovative solutions to seven sustainability challenges that are essential for AB InBev and other beverage companies, including circular economy, sustainable agriculture, climate action and biodiversity. Startups receive training and investment to launch a local pilot. Today, the initiative [has supported 116 startups in more than 30 countries](#) and partnered with major global brands. After completing the program, companies have the opportunity to pitch investors and collaborate with one of the partners on a larger commercial contract.

A number of the 100+ innovators presented their work at TED Countdown during interactive workshops meant to connect businesses, financiers and entrepreneurs. The solutions were varied — from Nostromo, a cost effective energy storage system for cooling, to Solutum, a biodegradable plastic alternative that dissolves in water. 100+ Accelerator partner companies are looking for solutions that can be replicated and scaled. For example, Nostromo's technology is now being installed in one of AB InBev's breweries, and Solutum is currently testing their material's suitability for Corona beer pallets.

Other TED Countdown participants echoed the promise of entrepreneurship ecosystems. [The Global Warming Mitigation Project \(GWMP\)](#) has provided more than 2,000 climate innovators around the world with the capital, talent and networks they need to scale. Their project, The Keeling Curve Prize, has awarded \$1.25 million in the past five years to 50 nonprofit and startup climate action organizations, which since receiving the award, have cumulatively raised an additional \$1.1 billion in funding.



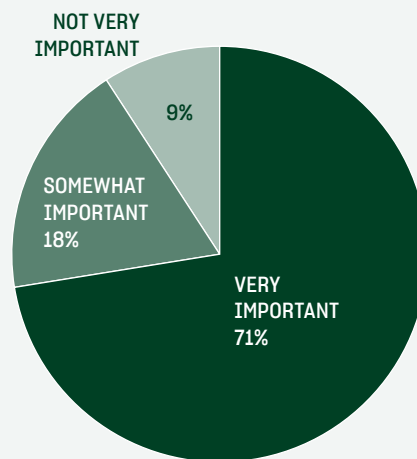
## 4. BUILD INTERNAL CLIMATE LEADERSHIP

When asked about one of her key takeaways coming out of TED Countdown, Ørsted SVP Olivia Breese shared that she wants to turn ideas into action by engaging the people in her own business who are responsible for implementation. Indeed, [employees can serve as an engine for change](#) within a company, accelerating climate action. But Kite Insights [recently found](#) that although 8 out of 10 employees are ready and willing to take action on climate change in their jobs, fewer than half felt “very” or “quite able” to take action.

**“Companies don’t drive change, people do.”**

**–Max Metcalfe, Leader’s Quest**

How can company leaders bridge this gap? Developing an internal ecosystem of change that empowers individuals to take action and lead on key issues. During a TED Countdown workshop focused on how companies can support their talent to accelerate climate action, participants shared the following insights.



How important is it to an employees motivation and well being that they can take action on climate change at work?”

[Every Job is a Climate Job report](#), Kite Insights

## KEY QUESTIONS FOR COMPANY LEADERSHIP

Do your company’s climate goals spark visionary work and ambitious action across the organization? Does employee engagement on climate action address their Head, Heart, and Hands?

In which areas might your company need to reskill and upskill as you transition to net zero? Are there under-considered communities who might be candidates for reskilling and upskilling efforts?

# How can companies foster employee climate action?

## BUILD BASELINE CLIMATE KNOWLEDGE

Research has shown that most employees need to develop their baseline knowledge about climate. Cross-company baseline education that includes information about the role of the private sector in climate action, the key challenges for your industry(ies), and your company's climate goals and plans is key. According to Kite Insights' engagement framework, effective action requires the Head (knowledge and confidence to make well-informed decisions), Heart (interest and motivation), and Hands (ability to act within the company).

## INCLUDE CLIMATE METRICS IN EMPLOYEE KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS (KPIs)

To make exponential progress, employees must be held accountable to climate action as part of the company's broader performance framework. This accountability helps employees understand when climate goals and broader business practices or products are at odds, and can help spark innovation around how to unlink company growth from carbon emissions.

## EMPOWER INTERNAL CLIMATE CHAMPIONS

Early- and mid-career employees are less likely to feel climate action is part of their job mandate than senior staff. Identifying climate champions who are eager to carry out sustainability initiatives – and empowering them with the resources they need – is a quick way to build momentum.

## UPSKILLING AND RESKILLING

As companies transition to net zero, workforce skills will also require transformation. During a Quest visit to Detroit's Dunamis Clean Energy Partners, CEO Natalie King shared her strategic effort to hire employees from underrepresented and economically disadvantaged communities most impacted by greenhouse gas emissions. Upskilling local workers meant she could locate her manufacturing facility in Detroit, close to her clients. King also sees opportunity in broadening her community's knowledge and awareness of Electric Vehicles (EVs) – when Dunamis workers talk to their friends and family about EV technology, they are more likely to purchase them. As Natalie King shared during the TED Countdown Summit, Dunamis is focused on making sure that no one is left behind in the EV revolution.



## SOLUTION SPOTLIGHT

### Building a workforce that is an engine for change

When thinking about the long-term sustainability of their company, flooring manufacturer Interface looked to nature, which has been working for 3.8 billion years. During a workshop with one of Interface's thought partners, Biomimicry 3.8, one biomimicry lens stood out as a helpful tool for shifting a business' mindset ahead of climate adaptations. At any given point in time, we are in one of four states of nature – dying, surviving, maturing, thriving – a continuum that describes the well-being of an organism. "We can say the same about businesses today," says Dayna Baumeister, co-founder and partner at Biomimicry 3.8. Business as usual is akin to dying, while most net zero initiatives might be considered surviving, Baumeister says. "It is only those organizations that consider their interdependent and interconnected relationship with the natural world, and act accordingly, that can move into the realms of maturing and ultimately thriving."

Commercial flooring company Interface strives to work in the thriving and maturing realms. They've found that one of the most important motivators is cultivating a purpose-driven culture. "It's not visionary to say, we're going to reduce our carbon footprint by 5% each year. That doesn't get anyone excited. Then you are coming to work every day to make

a 5% improvement," said Lisa Conway, Interface VP of Sustainability. Instead, they've looked for moonshot goals that motivate employees to attempt what is currently "impossible." When creating these ambitious goals, they're looking for targets that inspire ambition across the organization, and help with internal decision making. As part of their [Climate Take Back Strategy](#), for example, they asked employees to stop seeing carbon as the enemy, and start thinking about it as a resource. Now, the company is transitioning to products made of raw materials that use waste carbon or sequester carbon.

Once a company builds a strategy to engage their staff in sustainability, what resources are needed to execute? At Cemex, they implemented a climate-focused change management program that included a two-day online Future in Action Summit designed to educate staff on the cement industry's role in the climate crisis, as a Sustainability Academy with curriculum, which provided resources to upskill in key topics. As a result, Cemex has seen accelerated action and implementation, and adjusted [their climate goals](#) twice since 2020. They are now set to reach their climate goals ten years earlier than expected. And once people across the company could feel this momentum, Cemex linked middle and top management compensation to CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, their key climate indicator.



## 5. CRAFT A POWERFUL AND AUTHENTIC STORY

TED's Science Curator David Biello spends a lot of time thinking about how to craft climate stories that resonate with a broad audience. In a field that can be dominated by the jargon and data that underpins it, he seeks out new perspectives that can deliver powerful climate messages and expose people to ideas they wouldn't otherwise encounter. David believes this is why bringing a diverse group of climate actors together and curating TED Countdown as a festival of ideas is important: "There are different talks for different people."

Curious how speakers prepare for the TED stage?  
Check out [the TED Countdown Speaker Handbook](#).

### KEY QUESTIONS FOR COMPANY LEADERSHIP

When was the last time a story moved you deeply or changed your perception? What was it about the story that kept your attention?

What can people learn from your experience tackling climate risk in your business?

How can you share both your successes **and** how difficult it is to decarbonize? What context do you need to include to avoid greenwashing?

# How can businesses tell more powerful climate stories?

## 1. Look for a compelling story

Begin by asking what story will resonate with the audience. What are people curious about, and what can your company uniquely contribute to that conversation? What can others learn from your journey?

What's it like keeping the lights on during war? Ukrainian energy executive Maxim Timchenko shared how his company has diversified Ukraine's power structures to survive Russian attacks. This unexpected and timely perspective highlighted the resilience of renewable energy and the Ukrainian people.



[MAXIM TIMENCHENKO | THE RENEWABLE ENERGY REVOLUTION HAPPENING IN UKRAINE](#)

## 2. Find the best person to deliver your message:

On some subjects, the CEO and board members are the most authentic messengers. But in many cases, companies can drive a more powerful message by empowering a diverse set of storytellers, including those with specialized expertise or on-the-ground experience.

Jim Whitaker and Jessica Whitaker Allen are farmers who delivered a powerful message about the transition to regenerative agriculture, and their need for industry support (see Solution Spotlight below).

Sims Witherspoon, Climate Action Lead at Google Deepmind, demonstrated how an internal company expert can leverage their deep experience to engage a broad range of people. Her expertise in climate tech is clear, making her a trustworthy and powerful storyteller.



[SIMS WITHERSPOON  
CAN AI HELP SOLVE THE CLIMATE CRISIS?](#)

## 3. Share your challenges

Focusing on a single good thing your business has done around climate is a form of greenwashing and can invalidate broader company climate efforts. Set yourself apart by using evidence-based storytelling to convey why your actions matter, how they will need to be scaled over time and the challenges you face along the way.

Vice President Al Gore returned to the TED stage to reflect on the state of climate action today. The power of his talk comes from the clear case he makes that “the climate crisis is a fossil fuel crisis,” and willingness to question solutions distracting us from exponential progress today. His talk is a case study on the risk companies take on by avoiding responsibility for the climate crisis.



[AL GORE | WHAT THE FOSSIL FUEL INDUSTRY DOESN'T WANT YOU TO KNOW](#)

## 4. Show evidence of progress

At the 2023 TED Countdown Summit, multiple companies returned to the stage to answer questions about their progress since the last TED convening. If you haven't done something you committed to, why? What can others learn from your journey?

At TED Countdown in 2021, Jim Hagemann Snabe shared Maersk's bold ambition to transform their business and the global shipping industry.



[JIM HAGEMANN SNABE | DREAMS AND DETAILS FOR A DECARBONIZED FUTURE](#)

In 2023, Morten Bo-Christiansen and Bo Cerup-Simonsen took the stage to report on their progress, and the very real challenges that still exist



[BO CERUP-SIMONSEN | WHY RIVALS ARE WORKING TOGETHER TO TRANSFORM SHIPPING](#)

### SOLUTION SPOTLIGHT

## Finding an authentic business story

The diverse TED Countdown audience all seemed to agree that one of the most powerful stories shared during the Summit was that of Jim Whitaker and Jessica Whitaker Allen. Jim shared his family's long and tough history farming in Arkansas, including the sustainable practices they have innovated at their farm. His daughter Jessica then joined him, reflecting on how farmers can make their businesses both environmentally and economically vibrant for generations to come, including her son. Jim and Jessica's first-hand knowledge, rarely-heard perspective, and personal charisma made for a memorable experience.

**"Farming is a generational business. And we only get one chance a year to make a mistake. So when you tell people about doing things outside their norm, it scares the heck out of 'em... Risk mitigation is how we're going to get farmers involved."**

**—Jim Whitaker, Whitaker Grain**

**"Our town has 4,000 residents and one stoplight... Without places like this, and farmers like us you'd be hungry, naked, and sober."**

**—Jessica Whitaker Allen,  
Whitaker Grain**

Their authenticity is what made them stand out to TED's curators. When TED reached out to their networks in search of the most compelling stories about regenerative agriculture, global food company Mars – which invests in a range of sustainable solutions – recommended the pair of independent farmers. About [80% of the company's emissions](#) come from agriculture and land use change. The Whitakers' story demonstrated how difficult it can be to implement sustainable practices on the ground. It was also a powerful case study for why investing in climate trailblazers like the Whitakers can measurably reduce impacts, and how strategic partnerships are key to transforming the sector. Jim and Jessica were able to talk about real challenges that farmers and the agricultural industry face as they seek to decarbonize while making a living.

# **COUNTDOWN**

[TED Countdown](#) is a collaboration powered by TED and Leaders' Quest. Countdown was launched as TED's first issue-specific initiative in 2020 in order to champion and accelerate the bold ideas and underinvested solutions that can bring us closer to achieving a zero-carbon world – one that is cleaner, healthier and fairer for all. Looking for inspiration as you chart your own company's path to quick and effective climate action? [Watch the latest climate talks now.](#)

# **FUTURE FORUM**

The TED Future Forum is an initiative of TED Countdown focused on the role of business in accelerating solutions to the climate crisis. Achieving an equitable, zero-carbon world requires transformation of the global economy. Given its reach and scale, business is vital to creating a more prosperous future for all. Yet, insufficient action continues to erode trust in business. TFF is a community of companies committed to stepping up with greater climate ambition to help transform the global economy. [Learn more.](#)

## **AUTHOR- O'SHANNON BURNS**

O'Shannon is a researcher, writer, and sustainability consultant with 15 years' experience shaping mission-driven businesses and embedding regenerative principles into operations with a focus on climate action, conservation, environmental justice and sustainable travel and tourism. Through her consultancy Ochre, she has worked with the World Bank, National Geographic, Disney, Atlas Obscura, Regenerative Travel, and dozens of small businesses. O'Shannon is part of Cornell University's Center for Sustainable Global Enterprise at the SC Johnson College of Business. Previously, she spent a decade at National Geographic spearheading sustainability initiatives, and operating exploratory educational travel experiences on all seven continents.

[Learn more.](#)