



## **Interview with Jane Mosbacher Morris**

**For podcast release  
Monday, March 18, 2019**

**KENNEALLY:** In our own homes and in the House of Representatives, the holder of the power of the purse is in a powerful position. Spending choices determine what we will have for dinner and how government will invest in guns and butter. Yet spending choices also matter in many far-reaching and lasting ways.

Welcome to Copyright Clearance Center's podcast series. I'm Christopher Kenneally for Beyond the Book. Jane Mosbacher Morris is founder and CEO of To The Market, a company that connects businesses and consumers to ethically made products from around the world. In her new book, *Buy the Change You Want to See*, Mosbacher Morris urges us to think consciously about all of our purchases and to leverage our consumption habits to bring about change in the world around us. The choices we make whenever we open our wallet, she says, affect our environment, our communities, and our culture. Jane Mosbacher Morris joins me now on Beyond the Book. Welcome, Jane.

**MOSBACHER MORRIS:** Thank you for having me, Chris.

**KENNEALLY:** Looking forward to talking with you, because it's an interesting perspective you have about the power of purchasing. You really urge the readers of your book to think differently about the consumption habits they have, the purchasing power that they have. How did you start thinking about this, and what was the thought behind it – the sort of moral principle that was guiding you?

**MOSBACHER MORRIS:** Well, the conclusion that I came to – and I'd love to speak a little bit to the journey that I had coming to this conclusion – but the conclusion I came to was that if we aligned our purchasing decisions with our values, we could have a significant impact on other people and on the planet.

I came to that conclusion really after starting my career in the public sector. So I started working for the US Department of State and was actually working in national security, so a completely different approach and a completely different field that I'm in currently, which is retail. And what I continued to see as I traveled and worked overseas was how powerful market forces are. Regardless of where you fall politically, looking and spending time on the ground with people especially in the developing world, the dignity of work, job creation, and job sustainment was such a common theme that really had a big impact on me as it relates to thinking



about what can I both as a potential businesswoman and as an individual do to create and sustain jobs for communities I feel personally called to support? That's really the beginning of the journey there.

**KENNEALLY:** It's an interesting way of thinking about power. You were a worker at the Department of State, a really powerful organization, a powerful country that you represented, but this is a different kind of power. This is the power of the individual.

**MOSBACHER MORRIS:** It is. And it's so interesting to think about the power that each individual actually has. I don't think I really fundamentally understood the extent to which I as an individual, and then I as a small business owner, had until I started engaging with companies that literally looked at their bottom line every single day and would feel my purchases. They would feel my support on a daily basis. That could be the mom and pop grocery store around the corner from my house, or that could be the small coffee cooperative that I choose to buy from for my daily coffee. But the more and more time I talked to people who were a part of these businesses, the more I realized that every individual's buying decisions truly are felt by so many around the world.

**KENNEALLY:** And it's about thinking of the individual who's making the particular item and who is producing it, delivering it. It's really thinking beyond the product itself to the person.

**MOSBACHER MORRIS:** Really thinking about supply chains is something that with more technology and more globalization, we have more visibility than ever before to understand who's making our products, and how are they being made? Sometimes, the stories are really extraordinary, and we understand what me buying a cup of coffee for \$3 instead of 50 cents at Starbucks can do for farmers in the highlands of Guatemala.

On the other hand, I could also learn what had to happen for people or the planet for me to buy a T-shirt that's \$5, and that story might not be so compelling, in which case it likely would hopefully fuel me to say, hey, I don't feel comfortable continuing to buy this way.

**KENNEALLY:** Tell us more about this notion of supply chain transparency. How do we get to that point where we can see these links?

**MOSBACHER MORRIS:** Supply chain transparency is interesting, because it's a modern phenomena that we even really need it. Why I say that is 100 years ago, if I was a woman living in the early 1900s, I would likely have a handful of pieces of clothing in my closet. I might have a work dress, I might have a Sunday dress,



maybe if I was lucky, a couple of other pieces, and those were probably all made for me specifically, and they were probably made by a seamstress down the street. Now, it can sometimes feel like our clothes have beamed in from space onto the store floor. And through globalization and much of manufacturing moving overseas, we have often moved both figuratively and literally away from the makers of our products.

So supply chain transparency focuses on how do we make the journey that our product is taking from raw material to our front door a more transparent one so we can see if we feel comfortable with that journey? We've often talked about farm to table. Well, I like to talk about factory to front door.

**KENNEALLY:** That's a journey that goes from the factory to the front door, but the front door can be someone's home. It can also be someone's office. I think it's important to explain for our audience that this isn't only about the personal purchases you make, but the professional ones, as well.

**MOSBACHER MORRIS:** The professional purchases that nonprofits, that businesses of all sizes, of all stripes are pretty significant. And I don't think I fully understood the purchasing power of organizations until I left the government, because you do so little purchasing for legal reasons when you are working in the US government for good reason. However, when you are a small business owner or you're in a large business or even a nonprofit, you're very likely procuring products like corporate or donor gifts, T-shirts that say the name of your company. If you have a bigger office, maybe you have an office kitchen where you're buying coffee and coffee cups and mugs with your name on it. I mean, the list goes on and on. In fact, the branded product – sort of the corporate gifting space in the United States is a \$21 billion industry. So I like to remind people that they might say, oh, I'm not a buyer at a retailer. Well, most people aren't. But they probably have some product or some category that they might not even realize they're in charge of procuring for the organization that they work for.

**KENNEALLY:** So, Jane Mosbacher Morris, I hear your message, which is that every purchase matters, whether it's the purchase in the home or in the office or wherever you are. And it becomes a story of economic opportunity for those we are purchasing from. It can change lives that way. You have several stories that you can share with us, and you have seen how that matters in remote corners of the world where that small change is a real significant one.

**MOSBACHER MORRIS:** One of my favorite stories from the book follows my visit to a cooperative in Calcutta, India, that is employing human trafficking survivors. So a really unique population that is gainfully employed through the business of creating custom tote bags – literally the type of bag that you might procure as a conference



organizer or even if you're running a grocery store and you wanted to have a reusable bag with your logo on it.

When I spent time with the women who were working in this business in Calcutta, India, and better understood how transformational the dignity of work had been to them, it really, really encouraged me to realize that something that would feel like a really insignificant decision – if I'm sitting here in New York and I need to buy 100 tote bags for an upcoming team event, I might just pop online and go to an ecommerce site, build them myself, and order. But what I realized if I stop and I think a little bit about where I want to send that money – what do I want to do with that money? Having been on the ground and visited that cooperative, I really can see how all of us taking a step back and asking ourselves where we want to send money that we're planning on spending anyways and what we want to have happen with that money can really have a significant difference for someone else.

**KENNEALLY:** That question we're asking – where do we want to send our money – it applies to so many things, but I want to tie it to the industry that we care about the most here at Beyond the Book, which is media and publishing. It really matters where we get our publishing products from – our books, our news, our novels, whatever they may be. It matters to the individual authors, but it also matters to our culture, too.

**MOSBACHER MORRIS:** It's such a great point. And I think thinking about the type of stories and the coverage we want to see is another example of us as consumers really voting with our eyeballs, with our time, and sometimes with our wallet if we're buying magazines or newspapers. So if we as a community, as a culture, want to support robust storytelling and photography over scandalous celebrity tell-alls, we have the ability to impact that by purchasing publications that are doing that great work – *National Geographic*, it could be really beautiful writing, versus reaching for that tabloid. Because again, these publications are driven by consumer demand.

**KENNEALLY:** It occurs to me as you were saying that, Jane, that we are accustomed to thinking about making purchases that are good for the environment. You mentioned farm to table. When we buy some produce at the local farmer's market, we think that's good for the environment. But that's also true when it comes to other things, and it's good for our cultural environment, our intellectual environment, to make the same kind of conscious purchases when it comes to our media buying.

**MOSBACHER MORRIS:** That's a great point and one that I'm glad you brought up, because I think it's such a reflection of what do we want our national discourse to sound like? What do we want to have conversations with our friends and family



about? Is it about a celebrity divorce, or is it about something much more meaningful, much more thought-provoking, and much more important from a historical standpoint? And again, I think what we bring into our households, what we bring into our offices, that truly influences, as you said, the environment in which we're living.

KENNEALLY: Well, Jane Mosbacher Morris, we appreciate the chance to speak with you about your way of looking at our purchasing and consumption habits, as well as about your new book called *Buy the Change You Want to See*. Thank you very much for joining us today on Beyond the Book.

MOSBACHER MORRIS: Thank you so much for having me, Chris.

KENNEALLY: Beyond the Book is produced by Copyright Clearance Center. Our co-producer and recording engineer is Jeremy Brieske of Burst Marketing. Subscribe to the program wherever you go for podcasts and follow us on Twitter and Facebook. The complete Beyond the Book podcast archive is available at [beyondthebook.com](http://beyondthebook.com). I'm Christopher Kenneally. Thanks for listening and join us again soon on CCC's Beyond the Book.

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