

There be dragons - or are they dinosaurs?

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[Dragons Den](#)*, the international reality TV franchise that came out of Japan in 2006 and pits fund seeking entrepreneurs against celebrity seeking venture capitalists was on Canada's public broadcast channel CBC last week. 'Cleaning up with a dragon' and similar whoo-hoo one-liners introduced an 'Up-cycle Special' featuring fledgling businesses setting out to make the world a better place.

I happened to be in Montreal with my Canadian partners [Umalia](#) and as part of our week I spent one morning talking to the founders of the business which would set the den on fire that very night.

[Norden](#) is a business inspired by a book about a single organizing idea (SOI) that led to an epiphany that, in turn, bonded two forward thinking individuals in a partnership that has delivered a world's first. Norden's outer clothing range is the first to be completely made out of used plastic water bottles. The shell, lining and insulation are all entirely made out of traceable digitally numbered fibres supplied by [Repreve®](#). Only the zips and fastenings are not made out of waste. [Mayer Vafi](#) and his silent partner, investor and mentor [Michael Eliesen](#) have created a world first and in so doing shown how being organised around a single compelling idea can deliver the kind of practical sustainable solutions the planet urgently needs.

Mayer beamed as he set out his pitch. "Wow" a Dragon exclaimed; "It's so fashionable", "Hard to believe", "Very cool", "A good buy" others chimed in as choreographed models paraded Norden's wares and the Dragons tried on various styles for themselves.

But then it all went wrong and Mayer's beaming face dimmed. It would be easy to criticise, and well, that's what dragons do, so they did. They ravaged the poor guy.

They made some audience pleasing points, but what the Dragons singularly failed to understand is that Norden and other emerging businesses like it represent a new breed of business whose primary focus is not on maximising profit but on saving the planet. When the

clearly nervous Mayer tried to explain why he would welcome competitors into his space he was ridiculed "That's not true, that's not true, tell the truth" one fire breathing dragon exclaimed. Another suggested that he was talking nonsense. "No one puts \$1.2m in just hoping everyone else takes a market share."

But actually they do - because that is exactly what Norden is doing. As Michael explained to me earlier in the day. "Our objective is to lead change; to help make our industry sustainable. It's not at all easy and we can only do that if we all act together, not just with our suppliers and partners but also with our competitors too."

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It makes total sense. It's makes total sense to the likes of [Stella McCartney](#), it makes total sense to [Community Clothing's Patrick Grant](#) and it makes total sense to [Eileen Fisher](#) and [Patagonia's Yvon Chouinard](#). It even makes sense in other industry sectors as the Chairman of France's leading multinational [Suez](#) pointed out during a NY Climate Change Week 2018 meeting I was privy to "The only way to deliver real change is for all competitors to act together."

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I've always had a problem with Dragons Den and don't get me started on The Apprentice. I totally get that being nice in the reality TV game unfortunately doesn't cut the ratings mustard TV and advertising exec's desperately seek, but actually what aspiring entrepreneurs need is not criticism but encouragement, constructive guidance and feedback. Dare I also say a bit of empathy? Yes I dare.

Right at the very beginning of the show one dragon said "I think the den has always been a reflection of what is happening out there". Sadly that maybe true. To change that we need a change of attitude and that needs to come from business leaders in whatever guise they come be they dragons, titans or sharks. Sustainability isn't a business "trend to plug into" nor an act of charity "because I have a foundation" - it's our future.

Maybe Norden was on the wrong show but 'business as usual' is out of date and maybe the show is too?

**Apologies: The recording can only be viewed in Canada.*

Neil Gaught is the author of [CORE: How a Single Organizing Idea can Change Business for Good](#) published by Routledge. CORE is available at Amazon and other stores in [paperback](#), [audio](#) and [Kindle](#). In the USA you can find it here - [paperback](#), [audio](#) and [Kindle](#).

CORE was a finalist at the 2018 Business Book Awards