

What We Need to Invest in a Sustainable World: Lessons from Powerful Women

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“True freedom is understanding that we have a choice in who and what we allow to have power over us” – Meryl Streep

As Women’s History Month comes to a close and the world continues to witness the terrible price being paid by the Ukrainian people to defend their freedom -- their ability to choose whom they allow to have power over their lives -- these words carry fresh weight. It is clear that this world needs powerful leadership that is on the right side of history. Not only do we face the imperatives of regenerative energy transformation, sustainable food supplies, safe water, and a healthy ocean, the world is still struggling to recover from two-plus years of human and economic loss as a result of the pandemic. And now, a fresh threat to global stability has emerged and quickly fueled further economic uncertainty and another growing humanitarian crisis.

In terms of long-term global economic health, we need powerful business leaders who embrace corporate sustainability and the need for a systemic shift in the power dynamics of the capital markets. **We need leaders with the courage and commitment to invest in a sustainable world.**

And in the context of Women’s History Month, it is critically important to recognize that this is a world in which we need powerful women. Powerful women like many of those portrayed by ... the iconic Meryl Streep.

The Importance of Action

“Being powerful is like being a lady. If you have to tell people you are, then you aren’t.” These are the crystal-clear words of the divisive yet extraordinary **Margaret Thatcher** (played by Streep in 2011’s *The Iron Lady*). They are eerily reflective of the field of conscious capitalism and sustainable investing today. Stating one’s commitment to sustainability carries little weight; actions are what counts. In fact, some of the most highly sustainable companies in the world (e.g., Intel, Mars, Ecolab, Prudential...) just get it done rather than advertise their initiatives.

The Importance of Transparency

Another powerful woman portrayed by **Meryl Streep** (in *The Post*) was **Katherine Graham** of *The Washington Post*. Graham stated that “News is what someone wants suppressed. Everything else is advertising.” It is the companies that don’t offer us transparency which may end up in the headlines... but for their poor governance rather than for their excellence.

Keys to Good Corporate Governance

Arguably, good corporate governance is a proxy for the power of innovation, growth, resilience, and quality. And good corporate governance includes a deep and abiding understanding of diversity, equity and inclusion. With regard to some of the most powerful women in the field of corporate sustainability, few have had the enduring impact of Mary Shapiro (SEC), Anne Sheehan (CalSTRS), Jean Rogers (SASB), Suzanne McCormac (Morrison & Foerster). These women have proven another maxim of Katherine Graham: “Once, power was considered a masculine attribute. In fact, power has no sex.”

The Right Tools to Have Impact

Julia Child, also portrayed by Meryl Streep (*Julie and Julia*, 2009), said, “I think every woman should have a blowtorch.” While she was likely talking about making a crème brulee, her point was clear. Possessing the right tools allows the creation of something delectable. For impact investors, those tools include standards for corporate disclosures, social media, big data, and next-generation demands for a more regenerative form of capitalism. And there are those among us who believe that sustainable and impact investing is compelling. We can invest our capital to protect our air and forests, our seas and

animals, and our farmland. We can allow them to thrive while earning competitive financial returns. This is nothing short of delicious.

When Is the Right Time?

Speaking of delicious, in *The Devil Wears Prada*, Meryl Streep portrays Miranda Priestly, whose character is based on **Anna Wintour**, the iconic Editor of *Vogue*. Wintour has said that “It’s always about timing. If it’s too soon, no one understands. If it’s too late, everyone’s forgotten.” Happily, when it comes to investing in women’s economic empowerment and investing for positive and environmental impact, it is neither too early nor too late. It is just exactly the right time.

For more discussion about leading women of sustainability: [Superheroes of Capitalism: Part II - The Women \(forbes.com\)](https://www.forbes.com)

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