



## EPISODE 8: PODCAST TRANSCRIPT

# DOING GOOD + DOING WELL: LAUREN CLARKE, TURN COMPOST

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*“LC: As much as 40% of the US food supply is wasted and more food reaches landfills than any other single item in our everyday trash and the UN Environment has actually said that if food waste were a country, it would be the third-largest global country in the world that emits methane gas behind China and the US. CNBC had an article two months ago in August saying that tackling food waste can be a 2.5 trillion-dollar industry for businesses.”*

[INTERVIEW]

[0:00:45.9] LM: Welcome to Rise Leaders Radio. This podcast focuses on exemplary leadership, the type of leadership that brings about positive, meaningful change in places that matter. We explore how these leaders make things happen and the lessons they learned along the way. I'm your host, LeeAnn Mallory.

[0:01:11.3] LM: Lauren Clarke is Founder of Turn Compost, a Dallas-based social enterprise that's focused on reducing the methane-producing food waste that's piling up in our landfills. Turn Compost launched in April 2018, actually on Earth Day and it's been a wild ride, and a wildly successful year for Turn and for Lauren and her team.

As you listen, don't confuse Lauren's humility and unassuming nature for someone who doesn't get results. She is, in fact, an incredible leader. In this interview, listen for elements of Conscious Capitalism, particularly in the domains of Purpose Beyond Profit and she's got an impressive focus on Stakeholders and in fact, see if you can list all of the different stakeholders that are impacted by her work.

If you stay tuned to the end, you'll hear some advice that she gives for anyone starting up a new business and I will have lots of notes in the show notes, so be sure to check those out as well.

And I'm going to turn to Lauren now. Lauren, you're just back from a composting conference and in addition to the difference you're making in our community, you're also a mentor at WeWork and you'll be jumping right from our interview, right into a mentoring session, so I really appreciate your time this morning.

[0:02:34.9] LC: Absolutely LeeAnn. Thank you so much for having me.

[0:02:35.1] LM: So, I want to just jump right into the mission of Turn.

[0:02:38.0] LC: Yeah, the mission of Turn is to basically equip businesses and consumers to reduce their environmental impact. As much as 40% of the US food supply is wasted and more food reaches landfills than any other single item in our everyday trash.

[0:02:56.5] LM: I did not know that, and I always think of food as organic material, it will eventually decompose but is that true?

[0:03:05.6] LC: Yeah, so, food waste in our landfill is a bad thing because it creates methane gas and the UN Environment has actually said that if food waste were a country, it would be the third-largest global country in the world that emits methane gas behind China and the US. Food waste is a very bad problem for our environment.

When we throw away food, we're also reducing the benefit that it can provide in compost and compost is a wonderful thing for our soil.

[0:03:39.7] LM: Let's just jump in here too. Exactly how does it work? Tell me about your business and you know, how it works? I'm interested in the whole cycle.

[0:03:47.9] LC: Okay, we are a subscription-based model that not only helps the environment but rewards those who join us. We do a few things, first we transport organic waste locally to those who can responsibly recycle it. We actually produce a small amount of compost for our members. Thirdly, we educate and consult on sustainability practices related to the food cycle and very soon, we're going to be providing compostable products to all of our clients.

[0:04:16.7] LM: What does that mean, compostable products?

[0:04:19.9] LC: You're probably familiar and I'm sure your audience is hearing a lot about single-use plastics and how bad those are for environments, so there is a quickly emerging massive industry of manufacturers and distributors who are making products that are better for the environment because they are compostable.

They're made of plant-based materials like begasi, palm leaf, bamboo, sugar cane and those things break down quickly and more responsibly for the environment.

[0:04:51.4] LM: Are these products that you're going to be selling or what do you mean that you're providing those?

[0:04:57.5] LC: What we do right now is we service a number of residential and commercial clients across Dallas Fort Worth and those are folks that care about the environment, they care about the problem of food waste, and they also want compostable products in their home and in their offices.

[0:05:14.3] LM: I think with the way that this works is like if I were a subscriber, you provide me a bucket, and every week you come to my house and pick that up, you pick up my waste, you give me a clean bucket. Can I get these compostable products that way, is that part of the cycle?

[0:05:35.0] LC: Yeah, let me step back to how our residential program works in case I wasn't clear on that. We have two different options for people to engage with our program on a subscription level. The first is, we pick up at your doorstep. You get a five-gallon bucket, you put your food waste and your yard waste, your pumpkins, whatever is going on in your yard that you want to recycle and then we pick it up every week and then we give you a clean bucket. We have a doorstep program.

The second option is a community drop off program and we now have eight locations across DFW and expanding, and the idea behind that is to be a lower-cost option and more convenient option for people who are out and about throughout the week in their daily routines.

We're trying to make composting convenient. That is the second sort of pillar of our residential subscription service.

[0:06:28.1] LM: Excellent. I actually have a friend who subscribes, and she drops hers off at Whole Foods.

[0:06:33.2] LC: Oh, great.

[0:06:34.3] LM: She lives in an apartment and so it's not – I would imagine that the service isn't available in most apartment complexes yet. So she just takes her bucket up to the Whole Foods that's right across the street from her and she uses it that way.

[0:06:50.4] LC: Yeah, that's fantastic, we're really excited about this pilot partnership with Whole Foods.

[0:06:54.1] LM: I think I understand you're in 17 different zip codes in the DFW area now?

[0:07:00.2] LC: That's right, we have a pickup service in 17 different zip codes in Dallas and then we have eight drop off locations across DFW, as far west as Colleyville and South Lake, and as far east almost to Garland and then we'll open up a location in Denton, very soon.

[0:07:21.9] LM: Great. My next question after the one I'm about to ask is about like how hard you're working right now, but I'm also curious about – so you pick up the waste and some of it I think you deliver to places like Bonton Farms and other areas, farms that have livestock and they eat that waste directly, you just dump out the buckets and the chickens and the pigs go crazy. Is that one way that you're disposing of the waste?

[0:07:51.5] LC: Yeah, we process three different ways. First, we donate to local farms and gardens. Secondly, we produce a small amount of compost ourselves and the third thing is, if it is post-consumer waste and meats and dairies, we do partner with commercial composting facilities. A month ago, we had 10 massive totes, which are these large 64-gallon containers, at the Dallas Farmer's Market for their annual watermelon festival.

Consumers who were eating watermelon and the vendors who were providing watermelon dumped all of the leftovers and the unused items in there and those totes were transported to Bonton Farms and there were a bunch of happy – very happy hogs that ate that. Those leftovers. That's a really important part of what we do.

Another example of a local farm is there's a two-acre urban farm down in Deep Ellum, the acronym is F.A.R.M., it stands for Farmers Assisting Returning Military. They are creating basically a two-acre growing space on top of concrete. We provide compost and we process compost there and they're using that in their growing beds.

[0:09:00.8] LM: Does anyone pay for the waste that's being delivered to urban farms, or do you donate everything that you pick up from residential and commercial consumers?

[0:09:13.3] LC: To date, we have donated everything.

[0:09:16.8] LM: All right. Your primary revenue stream is through the subscriptions?

[0:09:21.1] LC: That is correct.

[0:09:22.3] LM: Now, I want to get to the – how hard you've been working because it's only been 18 months, you're in 17 zip codes, plus the drop-off locations. How are you doing? How's it been?

[0:09:41.0] LC: Well, it is a crazy amount of hard work but it's a very exciting place to be, both as a business owner and just sort of on the precipice of this entire industry of food waste. We are growing quickly, we had sort of an insane increase in revenue year over year, from Q3 2018 to Q3 2019, we had a 648% increase in quarterly revenue so –

[0:10:09.0] LM: Oh my gosh!

[0:10:10.8] LC: Yeah, it's very exciting, you know? CNBC had an article two months ago in August saying that tackling food waste can be a 2.5 trillion-dollar industry for businesses. There are companies in the food reclamation and waste arena that are quickly emerging on the national scene, approaching like a one-billion-dollar business.

What we're doing with Turn is a very unique model, but I believe in it. I believe that it's important, not only for the environment, but also I believe that it can be and will be a very viable business.

[0:10:43.4] LM: You describe your company as a social enterprise, and I don't know that in this area that term is as common in the northwest or on the west coast; I think people are more familiar with a social enterprise, how would you describe a social enterprise?

[0:11:03.5] LC: Yeah, that's a great question and I think it's just a fancy term for a business that does good. Maybe we should take it off our website. Essentially, we are a private business that is doing good.

[0:11:16.4] LM: I'm very involved with Conscious Capitalism, in fact, I'm just finishing my year as the Dallas Chapter Board Chair, and so it is interesting because when I read social enterprise or social impact company, I'm never quite sure if it's a private for-profit company or if it's a non-profit. You are clearly a for-profit company whose focus is on doing good and being profitable at the same time.

[0:11:49.4] LC: That's right. I think those two things are not mutually exclusive. I think they can work together very well.

[0:11:56.0] LM: The city of Dallas is not currently composting. I know there are many cities across the US and in fact, even in Austin, you know, they're really working on zero waste and they have a municipal composting initiative. What do you know about where Dallas is going with their composting and zero waste, or anything else that's more climate-focused?

[0:12:23.7] LC: You're absolutely right. San Antonio and Austin are the two cities in Texas that offer composting and organic recycling options for residents at a municipal level. Absolutely, other cities across the US, particularly on both coasts, are much more advanced than the city of Dallas is in terms of recycling in general. I can't speak for the city of Dallas in terms of what their plans are and what they're doing but I'm very excited that they have just issued this here — their first-ever climate action plan.

There's an acronym CECAP which stands for Comprehensive Environmental Climate Action Plan. There's an office within the city of Dallas called the Office of Environmental Quality and Sustainability and they have basically said, "We are going to do something about climate change, we are going to take action." There's a wide spectrum of issues that they're working on, from green spaces, to zero waste, to clean water, to transportation.

They have a website, it's [dallasclimateaction.com](http://dallasclimateaction.com) and they have had community meetings and they're inviting the community to participate in surveys in which citizens can say "Yes, I want this, or this is how it should be done." I would just encourage everyone in the next couple of weeks to check out that website and to follow the progress of what the city of Dallas will be doing. I think it's phenomenal.

[0:13:50.4] LM: I agree and that makes me so happy. You shared with me the last time that we spoke, a quote. "Calories are cheap, and Americans are picky." What does that mean?

[0:14:05.3] LC: Yes, that is a quote from an article in The Atlantic. I'd have to look at what month and year it was, about food waste and I love it because I do think it captures culturally sort of the extremes that we have around behavior and food. On one extreme, we have an abundance of food companies delivering things to our doorstep, whether it is restaurant food delivery, Uber Eats or Favor, or Grubhub, or we can have fresh food delivered to our doorstep through companies like Blue Apron, Hello Fresh.

You know everybody is trying to innovate in the food space and I think that that is long term perhaps going to be a problem for us behaviorally because we as Americans will in a long term way, start to take for granted even more how we get our food, where does it come from and how easy it can get.

[0:15:05.4] LM: What I am hearing about the quote then is that there might be a disconnect between how we consume food and where it comes from. So, we're getting further and further away from it. Is that part of what this article is saying and what the quote is saying as well?

[0:15:24.5] LC: Yeah absolutely. I think we are getting farther and farther away from the food cycle as consumers, not knowing where our food comes from, and not appreciating how much work goes into creating that food and just generally taking it for granted.

[0:15:40.3] LM: I have followed you, in fact, this is how I even learned about Turn, is that I think I was following another entity on Instagram and I saw one day a post, that Turn had delivered some goodies to the chickens and pigs at Bonton. There was something in there about the connection. You know, getting people more connected to the food source and gardening, that's one of the things that Bonton is doing; they're involving the community in the gardening.

And getting people more connected to fresh fruits and vegetables and to the land. That seems to be a trend with community gardens and school gardening and all of that. Are you all involved in a broader scope there? What is your opinion on our lack of connection?

[0:16:34.5] LC: I am very excited about educating people to grow their own food and part of what Turn does is to not only support local school gardens and community gardens but I see the future of the company moving toward a place where we can actually equip businesses and consumers to start to grow their own food and be closer to the food cycle.

[0:16:57.5] LM: Oh, that's fascinating. So, I had not heard that before that you have this longer-term vision of being an enabler of people being more connected personally to producing their own food perhaps.

[0:17:11.7] LC: Yeah, I mean I think going back to my grandmother who is someone I have been very close to my entire life and she was a child of the depression and grew up out in the country. You know, nine siblings and basically, they grew all of their food in their backyard garden, and people have victory gardens back in those days, you know, in that post World War II era. They were healthier and it was just part of their daily cycle was to harvest and to grow.

She often told me stories that the only thing they ever had to go to the store for was flour and sugar and salt and staples that they couldn't produce on their own.

[0:17:52.1] LM: There is something really romantic about that, you know harkening back to those days when we were more self-sustaining and just went into our backyard. I know I love when I can just go into my backyard and clip some basil for whatever I am making. So, there is something very satisfying about that, I think.

[0:18:12.5] LC: I think there is something totally satisfying about it. You know it is psychological, it is healthier physically for us to grow and eat our own food. It is very therapeutic. There is a whole industry called horticultural therapy if you will, and you sort of eluded to that in a way with what Bonton is doing, is sort of rebuilding community, rebuilding lives through the food process and the gardening process.

[0:18:35.7] LM: You know I am sure that there is some information out there and I may do some research and see if I can provide it in the shownotes. I was actually at the Nasher last night. They are doing a series on art and health and one of the things that the medical community knows and people who are interested in brain health, is oxytocin is a chemical that our body produces, that produces joy and happiness. So, when you have oxytocin, you're happier and that viewing art or things of beauty will produce that oxytocin.

And I imagine that time in nature and just the satisfaction of growing your own food also – and getting outside and walking. So that is the great thing about gardening as well is that you are actually getting outside and moving and exercising, which is also really great for health. So, I can imagine there's a ton of health benefits and mental health benefits through this horticultural therapy, so that is fascinating. I had not heard that term before.

[0:19:43.9] LC: Yeah, there are a ton of benefits. You know, well we all know, that social media and sort of addiction to digital devices is actually becoming sort of a new health epidemic. So, another reason why I think that getting outside and gardening – it's the small behaviors every day that get us closer and connected to nature, I think long term in our society, are just going to be a good thing.

[0:20:05.3] LM: Absolutely. I love that. I have a couple of other questions for you, or one primary question, and it's in the domain of social impact business, or social enterprise business, and if there is someone that you know and love and they wanted to start a social enterprise company, would you advise them to do it and what would you say? What advice would you give them?

[0:20:33.7] LC: Yeah that's a great question. Unequivocally, I would say yes, start it. You obviously would have to take into consideration your personal circumstances and what's happening with your family and your finances. I think probably the two biggest pieces of advice I would say, because what we are doing with Turn is a very, very new and innovative type of model, is first, is it able to be monetized and sustain itself? To further on that, would it be able to grow?

And then the second thing, is be sure that you have a close network of advisers to speak truth to you and be honest to you about the realities and people that are advisers from not just that industry in particular but other industries. At Turn, I have a very strong advisory council and those are people that are in horticulture; they are in animal nutrition, but they are also in the legal industry, and they are in real estate, and they're in the non-profit industry.

So, you have to have people around you that are going to get in your face and get into your business and to ask the hard questions. You have to be able to listen.

[0:21:42.3] LM: I was going to say that. It is great to have those people around you but if you argue with them when they give you advice, it doesn't do much good. So how have you prepared yourself to take on the advice and hear the hard advice, the hard news, of some of your advisors?

[0:22:01.8] LC: Well, you have to be open-minded and humble about it. You have to have and developed, I would say, some pretty strong grit to say if this is going to work in the long term, you know, you have to listen to reality and listen to people with Harvard MBA's. Just be humble and

realize if you really are passionate about it, it has to work and in order for it to work, you have to seek experts to make it work.

[0:22:33.4] LM: I want to also call in, you have a small child at home. I am wondering how you are balancing just the personal aspect because I know that you are traveling and working really hard. So, how's that been to balance being a mom and a business owner?

[0:22:53.9] LC: That is a great question. It is incredibly challenging. You know there are constant tradeoffs. My son is five and he is in preschool now five days a week, but the reality is that I have a very daily limited number of hours, five or six, where I can really, really, super focus to get things done. I think there is nothing like motherhood that can teach you multitasking. So, it is incredibly challenging, and it is a constant struggle to evaluate what's more important. You know the people around me or also the cause of what I am doing and to constantly weigh those two things.

[0:23:35.6] LM: Yep, I am an empty nester now, but I know that that was – it's hard to juggle all of that and evenly, it is more about juggling than a day to day balance. You know, you have to look over time it seems and say, "Over time, do I feel like that I am spending my life the way that I want to?" Day to day it may be difficult but over time, I think that that's where we're looking.

[0:24:02.9] LC: Yeah, absolutely. You know, on a personal note when I was researching this business and finishing up culinary school, you know, we went through a series of very painful miscarriages and losses and on the one hand it made me incredibly grateful for the children that I have, but it also made me realize that I won't be able to have children again and I want to pour myself into something very worthwhile. That's also something that's motivating me in this business, is to grow it.

[0:24:28.0] LM: Well thank you for sharing that. Of course, I did not know that and yeah –

[0:24:30.9] LC: That's okay. I'm sorry I just laid that down on you.

[0:24:33.7] LM: No, I think that it makes these conversations more real and more authentic because we're real people. We're not just business owners with one dimension. There is a whole dimension of life, and like you're saying, those people that we care about often provide for the sake of, "What am I doing this?" So, I am doing this to make a better world for my son and his family, the next generation. So, I think it is very noble that you have that perspective.

[0:25:08.2] LC: Well thank you. You know I care about my children, but I care about other children and children in all sorts of communities, wealthy and poor, and their connection with food and their understanding of it. You know, there is a big word out there right now. Well, two words I guess, food, food equity and food deserts. It is a problem and it's a very concerning one that we live in such a wealthy, massively expanding city as Dallas and yet there's still children and families out there that are struggling to get food on their tables.

[0:25:41.0] LM: So, we're wrapping up here and I want to thank you for taking the time. Again, I know just how busy you are, or I hear how full life is for you, which is, you know, really fantastic. Thank you for the interview and for what you're doing. As soon as I saw that I was like, "How can I support this woman?" so...



[0:26:05.2] LC: Thank you so much LeeAnn.

[0:26:05.8] LM: Yeah, it's really great. How else would you direct people to get involved either with Turn or in this movement?

[0:26:15.7] LC: Yeah, thank you so much. I would say you know sign up as a customer is one way you can support us. Our website is [turncompost.com](http://turncompost.com). Whether you are a consumer or perhaps you are a business that would like to start recycling your food waste, you can sign up for our services there or find out more. You are also welcome to volunteer with us, and also we are hiring. So those are three ways you can get directly involved with us.

[0:26:43.1] LM: Fantastic, all good stuff.

[0:26:45.3] LC: Yeah, if you are interested in environmental causes, there are a number of organizations that you can volunteer with. Texas Campaign for the Environment is one of those and they're a wonderful organization that advocates for a variety of issues about the environment and food waste is one of those. So, that would be another recommendation I have is to find like-minded organizations at which you can participate. So, I think that Dallas is about to hit a big green wave, and also demand for zero-waste services.

[0:27:16.3] LM: Thank you again Lauren for taking the time and for what you're doing in our community. I really appreciate it.

[0:27:23.0] LC: Thank you so much LeeAnn for this opportunity. I appreciate what you're doing.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[0:27:33.4] LM: If you like what you heard today and the direction this podcast is pointed, subscribe to Rise Leaders Radio on iTunes, leave us a comment and a five-star rating. You can also check out the Rise Leaders website at [www.rise-leaders.com](http://www.rise-leaders.com) to find the resources I pull from in my coaching and consulting work, and that I find central to transformative leadership. If you are committed to leading with the clear vision and from core values, and taking your team to the next level, then get in touch. You can reach me, LeeAnn Mallory, from my website. I'd be honored to hear from you. I appreciate you tuning in today and especially for being the type of person interested in learning more about how you could elevate your part of the world. Take good care.

[END]