



## **Ambition to Impact powered by Climate Impact Partners**

### **Episode 3: Going Full Circle with Jonquil Hackenberg and Sherah Beckley**

**Hannah Blackmore:** Welcome to Ambition to Impact. A climate action podcast, powered by Climate Impact Partners.

In today's episode Sherah Beckley, senior manager in our client solutions team, talks to Jonquil Hackenberg – experienced consultancy business leader, influencer, and sustainability change-maker.

During 2023, Jonquil took on the role as inaugural CEO of Eunomia Research and Consulting – specialists in the circular economy, focused on helping companies and governments figure out how to use less of everything in the first place and reuse all that has been used more effectively and creatively.

As Jonquil says: "In this decisive decade as we address climate adaptation, we need to be striving for 'unwasted'; simple as that. Unwasted is the applied circular economy."

Her passion for sustainability does not start and end with her job – she holds a host of external positions focussed on the circular economy, climate response, and gender equality including as Trustee of the UK Design Council, Member of the World Economic Forum's Futures Council for SDG Investment and Strategic Advisor to Saathi; which you'll hear more on later.

So today, we're going full circle with Jonquil Hackenberg to learn about her journey from ambition to impact.

**Sherah Beckley:** It's hard to know where to start, but let's begin with your current role. You joined Eunomia in 2023 as their first CEO and in your first role as CEO. Tell us a bit about Eunomia and what you do.

**Jonquil Hackenberg:** Sure. So, Eunomia is full of passionate deep-seated experts is probably the best way to describe it. We're about 150 people globally and we focus on everything around reuse, regenerate, conserve. So, looking at new systems, but also looking at the materiality of solutions. And we advise policy, for example, we're advising the European commission around the plastic strategy and the packaging strategy.

And that in turn allows us to then advise private sector clients on what's the implications of such policy, but we also do really cool stuff like redesigning our collection systems in, for example, Glasgow or around London. And so having that kind of granular knowledge of what it means to collect waste means that we can actually be really pragmatic in the solutions we provide.

**Sherah:** Yes, better systems thinking. In that, what has been so far, your biggest learnings as CEO?

**Jonquil:** The biggest thing is that we've done so many different things, and focusing Eunomia and what we are externally, so it's easier for us to partner, has really been my primary focus. We've got loads of people who are so passionate about everything from marine to land to plastics to aluminium that just finding a core message about what we're really good at as a collective so that we can amplify our impact has been kind of the biggest challenge, really, but the most exciting thing to land on.

**Sherah:** And with that, is there anything you've implemented that you are particularly proud of?

**Jonquil:** I'm super proud of the fact that at the beginning of October, we launched the nine-day fortnight. And why is that important? It's because if you're working in climate, it's actually big-ticket items and big problems you're solving for and thinking for the whole day. And that's quite overwhelming if you're trying to address it and finding your voice in a solution that's going to roll up and have a greater impact. And so, we thought what can we do by paying forward to our employees as they're giving back for all of us? So, every other Friday is off for us which is, it's honestly revolutionary, it's life changing.

**Sherah:** Yeah, because you need those times to just pause and catch your breath.

**Jonquil:** Exactly. And spend time with family and friends and digest everything basically.

**Sherah:** That's a tip we could all take away. And now just thinking about the industry specifically, (with regards to the circular economy), I mean being in the voluntary carbon market, especially now where definitions are evolving at pace, as you know all too well, I find that it's really important to just take it back to basics on what it is that we're trying to solve. So, with that in mind, could you please simplify what the circular economy means?

**Jonquil:** Yeah, so it's basically how do we use less of what we've got and reuse that which we have. So, it's almost moving away from recycling to, that recycling is almost becoming passé or will become passé. It's still obviously really important, we should still keep doing it, but thinking about reuse and redesign. It's about repurposing things and connecting different industries so that the waste of one industry becomes the value of another industry. That's really what the circular economy is.

**Sherah:** I think in the climate space more broadly, there's often the accusation of an alphabet soup of acronyms and terminology. I'd say the voluntary carbon market could be responsible for about 70 percent of them. So, I think this message is something we can certainly and should all take forward. And you can see that really well, thinking about your example with the redesigning of the recycling waste systems, because then the system is set in place for us to be able to just allow that to flow, right?

**Jonquil:** Exactly, right.

**Sherah:** And so, with the plethora of tools in the Climate Action Toolbox, why do you think the circular economy has such an important role to play?

**Jonquil:** I think it's at the centre, we talk a lot about decarbonisation, which of course is really important, but it's quite intangible for a lot of people. Many companies make commitments to science-based targets to net zero, all of these amazing things. But the reality is when the rubber

hits the road, they're not going to meet that because they haven't really fully understood what they've signed up to. We're in a dangerous place now, with a lot of greenwashing or companies being called out for greenwashing. And really, understanding the circular economy, understanding the embedded carbon so that the carbon that's needed to produce a product or a service, together with the embedded carbon within water and the associated waste it's just a real opportunity to redesign waste out of the system and therefore automatically reduce carbon and reduce water at the same time.

**Sherah:** Why is it important, or as a follow on to that, why should businesses and governments engage with this?

**Jonquil:** Because it's an opportunity really to do this properly. So rather than just saying, right, let's move to, I don't know, let's move to scope one and two, brilliant, we're moving to renewable energy solutions. You know, what does that mean? What happens to the end-of-life wind turbine? It's not always thought through. So, we still think in our design of even of decarbonization, we're still thinking in a very linear fashion - electric vehicles, what happens to the batteries at the end of them.

So just thinking about how we can reuse those rare earth minerals and put them back into the iPhone we're using or the Tesla car we're driving, whatever it might be. All of that's not really thought through and so engaging in that is ultimately going to solve for a bigger problem and it's a systemic change.

**Sherah:** I feel like, you've answered what I was going to follow on, but just digging into that a bit deeper - how do you work with governments and businesses to create a more circular and sustainable ecosystem?

**Jonquil:** From a Eunomia perspective, because we're deep-seated experts in policy, that means we need to be able to write policy in a way that's understandable so that businesses can engage and deliver upon that policy as can government. It needs to be written in plain English basically.

And so having both sides, the material scientists, the policy experts, but also social behavioural scientists means that you're designing a policy that you can actually engage with and understand. I think that's the biggest problem, a lot of it is so difficult and complex that people don't even know where to start or where to prioritize.

**Sherah:** Definitely it goes back to your point about it being sort of intangible when we think about decarbonization and this is something interesting that we find when we work with companies that are starting to measure the footprint of their entire company or operational footprint or a particular product or even an event, and they start to see everything along the way that has created that footprint. It really brings it to life for them. It becomes tangible.

Looking to the future, how do you see the circular economy evolving in the next decade? And what role do you think businesses will play in driving this transformation?

**Jonquil:** I think we're going to see blurring of lines between different industries. Going back to that whole point around, the waste of one industry is the value or the gift for another industry. I think we're going to start to see new businesses emerging and new business models emerging accordingly. And if you think about reuse as a concept that needs to be designed. If we think recycling is curb side collection and it basically goes to recycling units, typically provided by a government or local authority, which is maybe supported by a private sector waste collection.

Reuse means we've got to think about everything from supermarkets, like how do people refill things in supermarkets through to reusing materials that they ordinarily would throw away. Communities need to engage with local authorities, which need to overlay and engage with business. And that's complex.

I think what's going to happen is we're going to see smaller city projects that are trying to address all of those things at once to affect a system change.

**Sherah:** That's exciting.

Bringing us back to today, what do you think is holding government back or businesses back from engaging in the circular economy?

**Jonquil:** Governments, it's always down to politics, isn't it? It's about the next election. And so, everyone holds spend until they've repositioned their thoughts, not pointing to any country in particular at the moment, because it probably goes for anyone. So that's one problem. The second thing is, it's just priorities. Genuinely priorities. So how do you prioritize that over education? How do you prioritize that over infrastructure? When the education is needed today now, and climate can always wait a little bit because it's not now. How do we make small changes that make ultimately a big difference over time? So that's one massive thing that's holding us back.

The second thing is everyone thinks if we solve for decarbonization, then that's the silver bullet. And the reality is, water is going to probably be our biggest challenge. It's going to be the reason for mass migration, whether it's floods or droughts, it's going to be the reason for infrastructure collapse because of the same things. And so, thinking things through, how does it all play together as another challenge?

And then I'd say the third one is it comes back to communication, like basic understanding of what do we need to do and why now, and it shouldn't be like this doomsday foreboding that we kind of position all the eco warriors about. It should be, this is possible if we do X, Y, and Z. We need to change the narrative.

**Sherah:** Definitely. And we're hearing it more and more with regards to the circular economy. So, do you think it's become mainstream?

**Jonquil:** Do you know, I don't know what the answer is to that because we're so involved in circular economy if we're all working the space, right? So, we understand it. I'm not sure the everyday human does know what that means. Therefore, let's stop talking about that. Let's talk about waste for example, let's talk about un waste, un wasted, that simple language that everyone can engage with. And no, it's definitely not mainstream, but people are starting to think about it.

Changing systems, you know, moving to a refill model, necessitates a certain pocket and ability to spend, it's still a rich person's problem. And so leveraging ideas from, you know, the global South where they just do that as a matter of course, it's like taking ideas from other parts of the world and not just assuming we're going to solve everything in London, I think would be a very good way to go about it.

**Sherah:** It's almost like you knew my next question which is just about that. Speaking about the Global South or other locations, are there any locations where it's becoming mainstream or that are good examples to reference?

**Jonquil:** I still don't think it is mainstream anywhere, is my view. What I would say is when companies, particularly if you think about fast moving consumer good, and how they design their supply chains. And so, the supply chains, which is obviously scope three, which is where we really need focus on circular economy, it's typically impacting the global South because it's cheaper to produce things there, whether it's food or fashion, whatever it is. And that is of course where resources, natural resources are most constrained because of weather and because of mass populations. And so, rethinking how we make global supply chains go local so that it, it happens within a certain parameter or perimeter, I think is something that we need to really reconsider.

**Sherah:** And thinking about specific initiatives, or projects Eunomia is currently working on, or that you have worked on in the past, that really highlight the innovative nature of the circular economy - the example that comes to mind is at Saathi, where you're a strategic advisor, they developed the first 100 percent natural biodegradable sanitary pads using banana leaves didn't they?

**Jonquil:** Yes, banana stem fibers exactly. I just can't talk about Saathi enough, I'm literally their world's number one fan. I met them through Katapult Ocean, which is the Norwegian fund focused on a sustainable development goal 14, life below water.

Saathi means friend in Hindi, so not only have they created sanitary products made from banana stem fibers and others, they've hired a hundred percent women in their factories, they've broken the taboo around periods, particularly in India, which is where they're headquartered. They've gone from farm to farm in the North - Tarun, one of the founders, has basically gone and knocked on farmer's doors and said, would you like more money for the banana stems? Which is ordinarily waste, to which the answer, of course, is yes, please and they then insist that they use that money to send their children to school.

They're making system change. And they're just, I mean, awesome humans with an amazing story. And, you know, 28 million girls drop out of school every year in India when they get their periods because it's taboo. Breaking all of that and just thinking about the system, socioeconomic change that you can make by touching environment as well, is basically where we need to get to.

**Sherah:** It's really great that you're talking here about the connections to the Sustainable Development Goals and wider changes beyond climate impact alone. This is something central to the voluntary carbon market, where project impacts are measured against the SDGs too. A good example is clean cooking projects, which both reduce emissions created through the burning of firewood, but also have enormous community impact for women and children in particular.

And how can businesses embed the circular economy strategies into their wider climate strategies?

**Jonquil:** So, focusing on specific individual brands of their large organizations is one very good way to do it or collaborating with others. You know, focusing on, for example, there's an initiative at the moment redesigning a universal bottle in FMCG (fast moving consumer goods), which is a collaboration between different, ordinarily competitors, because they realize it will be much easier for reuse design and system design. And it's a bit like in 2015, I think it was, there was a realization again from FMCG, which was initiated by Unilever, but then they brought in P&G and

Gillette and everything, and it was hashtag un-stereotype. And that's when we started to see the change between adverts of women doing the washing up and the men sitting in the sofas. And so that all flipped around, and Gillette started, you know, redefining masculinity and it was okay for men to cry, yeah, it's really powerful. And that was like, we need to change the industry because this is wrong. And so, in a similar fashion, you're starting to see these initiatives around redesign for circular economy, like the bottle.

**Sherah:** And where everyone, like you mentioned earlier, knows about SBTI or net zero targets, are there any other examples that you can think of with regards to how they've been able to embed the circular economy into a net zero strategy, for example?

**Jonquil:** One example on this is Loop, which is a collection system - it's a reuse system or a refill effectively. So, Loop as a solution, and that's one of many refill solutions, there's another one called Beauty Kitchen, which I've come across recently. They are effectively designing that whole concept, which is, I guess it's stemmed from Germany and Northern Europe, which is you pay a deposit for your bottles and then you return it and you get your 15 cents, whatever it might be, back. They're doing the same thing for the beauty industry so, you can refill your shampoos or you can refill, your creams or whatever. It's not 15 cents, it's typically two or three euros per bottle, but they're beautifully and stylishly designed again, playing to a richer purse.

But the point is that won't work in isolation. It needs to work with a Nestle, Unilever, a Diageo, a L'Oreal, whatever it might be. And so, the system design of reuse and refill is then impacting a myriad of circular economy strategies that are ultimately going to contribute to less waste.

**Sherah:** Bingo.

Are there any misconceptions about the circular economy that you frequently encounter and what would your response be?

**Jonquil:** What is the circular economy would be probably one. Because it just sounds like very academic language. It sounds impossible to achieve it. So just breaking that down again, going back to the concept of unwasted and we spent a long time going, what does this mean for a three-year-old?

Breaking everything down on climate has to be for a three-year-old because nobody is big enough to solve this problem on their own. Therefore, it has to be an inclusive global strategy because climate, is greater than the sum of any individual self or organization. So, I'd say going back to language and simplicity is largely the problem.

And, talking about circular economy and solving it for one brand or one single product, but not for the rest of your strategy, it's a bit like ethical clothing for example a company saying we do 10 percent ethical clothing - what's the rest? Is that child labor? It doesn't play well to your dialogue and narrative if you're not really thinking a bit more holistically.

**Sherah:** I couldn't agree more. And this is something I talk about a lot with clients. And I think we need to find these connections and how one action triggers the next.

Speaking of dialogue and narrative and just overlaying the urgency and need, what do you think are the most effective ways to communicate the urgency in which governments and businesses need to act on climate?

**Jonquil:** Connecting it to that three-year-old. I think we do a lot of, as I said before, doom and gloom, the end of the world is nigh, and everyone is just kind of numb to that language. So showcasing solutions and how we can scale up is really key. For example, there's a part of the World Economic Forum called Uplink, which actually does stuff rather than talks about stuff. And what they do is they convene investors and they convene startups to have dialogues around what's preventing us from scaling this up.

We've got enough innovations, that's my perspective. We don't need new innovation with people who want to save the world with new ideas. What we really need is the ability to scale up and industrialize technologies and join different parts of the value chain together. That's really key.

A solution for scaled up financing to match scaled up innovation is really important.

**Sherah:** Thank you. Switching gears slightly, this is a bit more on the personal note, you use your expertise and clear passion for sustainability in so many roles outside of your job - as chair of the Magenta Project, trustee of the UK Design Council, member of the World Economic Forum's, Futures Council for SDG investment and strategic advisor to Saathi, and lead mentor for Katapult Ocean. What inspires you to give your time to these projects and companies?

**Jonquil:** I'm just really passionate about this space. I guess when I started out in sustainability, which was probably 2012, when I did an MBA in renewable energy, and I didn't even know how electricity worked at the time, there was that. That felt very alien to my day job of working in digital transformation, large scale change, at my job at then Infosys. And over time, I've just brought these things together so it doesn't feel like I'm doing myriad things. It's basically the same part of the same narrative. It's my story.

A lot of it is centered around the ocean because I love sailing. Because it gives me so much joy, but also so many life skills. It's not just about drinking gin and tonics. It's very much rolling up your sleeves, helping people and fixing things, reusing things, you know, all of those things. And it was so important to me as a child, that has driven a lot of my passion and understanding of oceans and that's why I took on the Magenta Project role. Here I focus on how we get more women into sailing, for example and to me, sailing is a reflection of the corporate workplace because it's the only sport where you need multidisciplinary skills, all in one team, which doesn't necessitate just men or just women. All of that interlinks.

To answer your question in a very long-winded way, it's just really linking everything. It just feels like the next part of a story and I'm always connecting things in my head and figuring out who I can introduce to whom. Because again, we're not going to solve for this unless we connect people.

And so that is really driving a lot of me, because I think that will drive a lot of the change in the world that we need to see quickly.

**Sherah:** That transformational change.

As you were speaking, I was envisaging this quilt where all the pieces come together.

**Jonquil:** Oh, that's nice. I like that.

**Sherah:** Speaking of a quilt, what are you most proud of through these roles?

**Jonquil:** I'm proud of the fact that my daughters are moving in this direction, my eldest, Alaya, she's 11 and a bit, they just recently moved to Glasgow and she stood for the eco committee and her pitch was around because "mummy's CEO of Eunomia and I believe in unwasted" and she would actually like to rename the company to no time to waste, which I think is awesome. I think it's very strong, probably quite heavily influenced by James Bond.

**Sherah:** That works.

**Jonquil:** It works, right? We need our superheroes. But going back to language and translating, and constantly translating it back to them so the next generation understands. I'm proud of that. I'm proud of the fact that, you know in some way, I get to see all these amazing solutions that are out there and help people connect so that they can scale and move on. And I think that's really exciting.

On a personal note, I'm proud that I've managed to shift my entire focus to be in this space rather than doing it as a side job. I think that's been really important to me.

**Sherah:** It's really inspiring. Before we let you go, and finally, a question we ask all our guests, who do you know or follow who has moved their ambition to tangible impact and why do they inspire you?

**Jonquil:** I have to say Joe Papineschi, who's the founder of Eunomia, he just lives and abides by everything unwasted. In very simple ways, ways that might be quite shocking, but it makes me self-check. For example, we were at a conference around and this would be a great example of how we need to change the dialogue, it was around the impact of the plastic on human health and if we were to talk about that, we'd all be recycling and reusing tomorrow, I guarantee you.

Anyway, we were at this conference, and at the end, you know, there were drinks and canapes, (and it wasn't our conference, just to highlight that), we had to go on somewhere else, and there was lots of food left, and he took two Tupperware boxes out and just took some of the food because it was just going to go to waste and I was kind of really shocked. But the point being, it made me go, "oh, that's a really good idea, I didn't really think about that."

In a similar way, we have a, another wonderful woman who works at Eunomia, Celia, and we had a weekend away just after I joined, she went and collected via the Olio app, where you can get food from supermarkets that's going to be thrown out. She cycled all the way to the other side of London to get 50 baguettes, took them to the weekend away, foraged for garlic, and made garlic bread for 100 people.

Just the sense of self value set against the value of the company is pretty, pretty impressive, I have to say. That inspires me.

**Sherah:** That's amazing, that's really walking the talk.

Thank you very much, Jonquil it's been an absolute pleasure speaking with you today.

**Jonquil:** Thank you very much for letting me be here. Enjoyed it.

**Hannah:** Thank you for joining us for today's episode of ambition to impact. We hope you enjoyed it as much as we did and are left feeling inspired. Be sure to subscribe to our podcast on your favorite platform. So you never miss an episode. And if you found today's conversation valuable, please consider leaving us a review.



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Stay tuned for upcoming episodes where we'll continue our journey from ambition to impact.