“[Customers] don’t understand the power they have” says Danielle Fugere, President and Chief Counsel of As You Sow, a shareholder advocacy group that pushes corporations to make positive footprints. More than 84 per cent of consumers say they want to support companies making real progress. If shoppers act on this impulse, they are essentially voting with their dollars for the change they want to see in the world.

In order to win these customers with real brand activism, companies need to build causes into their strategy, not just their marketing. Clif Bar is lobbying for legislation to forgive student loan debt for budding farmers, one of the major obstacles keeping youth from jobs in agriculture, an aging industry. Patagonia donated their entire $10 million Black Friday sales to conservation projects in 2016. And Airbnb paired an ad for diversity during the Super Bowl with free housing to refugees and those in limbo in the United States after the travel ban.

Companies represent 58 per cent of the largest economic entities in the world, with tremendous resources to grow and scale. When they invest meaningfully in causes, marrying profit and purpose, they make sales and social impact.

For Stepanek, corporate causes hold tremendous promise. But she cautions shoppers: “Awareness is not an outcome, it’s the start of the journey.”