



# Social Impact Heroes Helping Our Planet: Why & How Evan Harrison Is Helping To Change Our World

An Interview With Martita Mestey



Martita Mestey · [Follow](#)

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**As** a part of my series about “individuals and organizations making an important social impact”, I had the pleasure of interviewing Evan Harrison.

*Evan Harrison is the Chief Executive Officer at Kiss the Ground. A pioneering digital media leader and audience builder, Evan began his career by helping transform iHeartRadio into a multi-platform content creation company after a decade of innovation at AOL Music. Earlier executive roles included Univision, Townsquare Media and Hula Entertainment Group. Evan has been recognized in Advertising Age, Billboard, Businessweek, Crain's, The Hollywood Reporter, New York Times, Reuters, USA Today, Variety, The Wall Street Journal and more.*

*Evan's passion for global environmental stewardship and personal health dates back to his lifelong love of the ocean and surfing. Nearly a decade ago, he joined the national board of directors of The Surfrider Foundation, a nonprofit organization dedicated to protecting the world's oceans, waves and beaches.*

*At Kiss The Ground, Evan focuses on the transformative work of promoting regeneration and healthy soil as a viable solution to the escalating climate, wellness and water crisis. He's actively involved in developing partnerships that bring new skillsets and voices to the regenerative movement as it raises awareness, strengthens corporate accountability and drives policy change.*

*Evan and his family live in southern California.*

**Thank you so much for doing this with us! Before we dig in, our readers would like to get to know you a bit. Can you tell us a bit about how you grew up?**

**I** was born in NYC and grew up in central New Jersey. Riding BMX bikes through the woods, battles of the bands, record stores and surfing on very inconsistent waves were among the highlights of my childhood. I was obsessed with the West Coast thanks to surf magazines and the music of the Beach Boys and The Doors. College took me West, but not quite to the coast. Arizona State University is my alma mater, and the desert is also fascinating to me. After college, I moved to San Francisco and began my career in the music industry in the mail room of record company BMG. This was an exciting time as fans were replacing their cassette collections with CDs, and alternative music was gaining momentum. I learned the business at the ground level in our sales and marketing divisions, and five years later, I was asked if I would move to New York for a corporate job as head of online marketing. The question was, “Hey, do you think you can market our artists more efficiently online if you work with the artists and the internet service providers?” Of course! I leapt at the chance.

**You are currently leading a social impact organization that is making a difference for our planet. Can you tell us a bit about what you and your organization are trying to change in our world today?**

It's all about perspective. Years ago, industry leaders didn't believe people would want to experience music on a computer or phone. There's a big shift also underway that we're advancing at [Kiss The Ground](#). These days, we're inspiring the world to shift the perspective from doom and gloom to hope and resilience. Regeneration and healthy soil are viable solutions to the escalating wellness, water and climate crisis. Our organization was formed 11 years ago, and I'm leading a talented and passionate team to enlist more doers in growing regeneration as a worldwide movement. A big part of my job is forging partnerships to bring new skills and voices to the movement so we can raise awareness, strengthen corporate accountability and drive policy change.

**Can you tell us the backstory about what inspired you to originally feel passionate about this cause?**

Surfing. It started with my connection to the ocean. As the sea started to show obvious signs of illness, I learned that in addition to plastics, chemical run-off was making surfers sick on a regular basis. My happy place was clearly in jeopardy! It was scary but also motivating. I couldn't just tell my kids everything would be OK. As a parent, I can truly say there is no greater joy than feeling the sun and paddling into waves together. We can all find ways to make a difference.

**Many of us have ideas, dreams, and passions but never manifest them. They don't get up and just do it. But you did. Was there an "Aha Moment" that**

**made you decide that you were actually going to step up and do it? What was that final trigger?**

Not long ago, I was working a local media job in Colorado. I'd convinced myself that snowboarding in Steamboat would fill in the gaps between surf trips. And I wanted to travel less as my kids entered middle school and high school. I'd been on the Board of Directors of Surfrider Foundation for several years, and my daughter volunteered and helped me produce their fundraiser events. She joined a local environmental nonprofit in Colorado. I was promoting a music festival for 20,000 people, and she asked me if I could help her promote a film they were screening. It was called "Kiss The Ground," and some guy I might know named Woody Harrelson was in it. I edited down a promotional clip and couldn't believe what I was seeing. How did I not know about this? Several months later, I put out feelers to see if I could apply my skill set to help solve our environmental problem. My son got into a competitive art high school in L.A., so it was time to look for a new job. And magically, a recruiter asked me if I'd heard of Kiss The Ground. They were looking for a CEO to help take the message mainstream. Dreams, passions and goals coalesced!

**Many people don't know the steps to take to start a new organization. What are some of the things or steps you took to get your project started?**

Define the problem you are trying to solve and have a good idea of how you will go about doing that. Listen, remain agile and keep it simple. Build a team of like-minded people who put teamwork first. Be inclusive.

**Can you share the most interesting story that happened to you since you began leading your company or organization?**

This year, the “Common Ground” documentary launched, and so far, we’ve been in hundreds of theaters and have had 6,000 individual theater requests. The documentary has won six festival awards! And in farming, we’ve seen millions of acres begin to transition to regenerative agriculture. A new narrative is taking hold.

**It has been said that sometimes our mistakes can be our greatest teachers. Do you have a story about a humorous mistake that you made when you were first starting and the lesson you learned from that?**

So many. Here’s a fun one. Years ago, as a young “digital leader” for an old media company — decades before Zoom and video calls that actually worked — I was holding a summit for 20+ people who were flying into NYC. I flew in the night before and stayed at a hotel near our meeting venue so I could get a good night’s sleep and be ready for a fun and super-productive few days stoking team cohesion. I woke up at midnight with a sneezing fit. No problem, I reached for my Claritin and went back to bed, only to get a phone call at 9:00 a.m. the next morning from my COO. He calmly asked, “Where are you?” I was so confused. It didn’t take me long to realize, oops, I guess I took an Ambien by mistake!

It’s a nice lesson that blowing a tight schedule and kicking things off with the boss laughing at himself... well, that’s enjoyable for all.

**None of us can be successful without some help along the way. Did you have mentors or cheerleaders who helped you to succeed? Can you tell us a story about their influence?**

Many. Mentorship is critical to any success. Bill Wilson, who picked me from a large crowd to move to corporate and build an online marketing group at



BMG at age 27, has been my mentor at three companies. He remains one of my closest friends in the world. Before I met Bill, I was new to the workforce. The president of our distribution company at BMG, Pete Jones, set a high bar for knowing all his employees — making sure we felt like we all played a meaningful role in selling our music. Every year, he hosted our entire company in a new city to spend five days listening to our artists perform at night (with after-parties, of course) and presentations from our labels all day. From across the country, 700 people attended. We were getting to know the art and connecting more deeply with one another. On the last day of the convention, Pete took to the stage to thank every person by name, market by market, department by department. He methodically and enthusiastically used full names, and titles. He knew his people, and he made it known. That evening before we all went our separate ways, we were all invited up to his hotel suite to party until the sun came up — I usually made it to daybreak.

**Are there three things the community, society, or politicians can do to help you address the root of the problem you are trying to solve?**

Personal accountability in our choices is #1 — from drinking straws to solar energy. Whatever the scale, it all adds up. Personal accountability is all about walking the walk daily. The truth is we don't all need to do ALL THE THINGS. Do what you can and be both accountable and inclusive. Don't shame people and talk in simple terms — common ground. Think about what we are leaving behind.

**How would you articulate how a business can become more profitable by being more sustainable and more environmentally conscious? Can you share a story or example?**

Authenticity is always the strongest market message. Start by articulating who you are and what you stand for. Be humble with a strong ethos. If you're all about maximizing profits, say so. People can accept that if they also understand that the revenue streams you're generating count in ways that are personally relevant.



**What are your “5 things I wish someone told me when I first started” and why?**

1. You don't have to have all the answers. Be comfortable saying what you don't know. People open up to that.
2. Be your authentic self. Don't spend any energy trying to be someone else.

3. Don't waste time gossiping. It's completely counterproductive.
4. Teamwork is everything. Be wary of anyone who wants to take too much credit for the team's work.
5. If you work for a big corporation, understand that it's going to be hard to drive change. However, it's worth putting in the time because of the size of the prize. Big organizations can generate MASSIVE impact. By being your authentic self, you can naturally win people over with passion. Don't pay too much attention to titles; titles don't earn respect. Actions do.

**If you could tell other young people one thing about why they should consider making a positive impact on our environment or society like you, what would you tell them?**

Young people and rising generations have the opportunity to make this world an amazing place for a really long time. If we as humankind take for granted the beauty and bounty of planet Earth, the consequences will be severe. We don't need to argue about "the solution" as if there's just one, simple thing. As Walt Whitman said, "I contain multitudes." We all do. The generations I see coming of age now in all their diverse expressions of humanness are amazing at rallying and getting into action as a mighty force for good. To all young people, I believe in you completely. You inspire me.

**Can you please give us your favorite "Life Lesson Quote"? Can you share how that was relevant to you in your life?**

"Wherever you are, that's the place to be." While the content from "Fast Times at Ridgemont High" was different, the quote has always stuck with me. Be present; that's captivating. Be positive; that's a contagious attitude.

This quote keeps me grounded. And for those who suffer from “FOMO” — as we all do — this kind of awareness can help keep you centered if you really focus on it.

**Is there a person in the world, or in the US with whom you would like to have a private breakfast or lunch with, and why? He or she might just see this, especially if we tag them. :-)**

I’ve met so many amazing people; not going to namedrop, but wow, have I been fortunate. But Malcolm Gladwell comes to mind. We’d flow nicely, I am certain. I’d mainly listen.

**How can our readers follow you online?**

Our website is [KissTheGround.com](http://KissTheGround.com). I’m on LinkedIn: [Evan Harrison](#). On Instagram: [@evanharrisonsurfs](#).

**This was very meaningful; thank you so much. We wish you only continued success in your great work!**

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