# Transcript: Everyday Climate Champions Podcast

# Episode 6: Giving Eco-Friendly Gifts

**Ellisa Feinstein (Host):** Hi everyone. Thank you for joining me, Ellisa Feinstein, your host for this episode of “Everyday Climate Champions”, where we are going to explore how to give gifts that have a minimal effect on the planet.

I love giving gifts and am always looking for new ideas that are both meaningful and eco-friendly. While I forgo wrapping paper, knowing that most of it is not recyclable, - in fact, 2.3 million pounds of wrapping paper ends up in the landfill every year - it can be challenging to find gifts that are both meaningful and not made of plastic or other non-recyclable materials. It's one of the reasons I was thrilled when the new eco -market called Simple opened up in my San Francisco neighborhood.

And today I'm happy to be talking with Simple's Abbe Clemons to get more insight and tips on sustainable gift-giving.

Abbe is the founder of Simple, which offers a range of zero waste and bulk items for the home and body, mostly from local makers, and is located close to the infamous Haight-Ashbury district.

Abbe, you've been working in environmental and urban planning for more than 15 years. Can you tell me what inspired you to open Simple?

**Abbe Clemons (Guest):** Hi, Ellisa. I'm so happy to be here. Thanks for having me on. So, Simple has been something that has been stewing in my brain for I'd say a decade.  grew up in a family where nothing was ever thrown away. Everything was repaired, repurposed, reused. But then at some point life gets busy and, you know, it's so convenient to just go to Target or Amazon and buy everything you need in one shopping trip and fill your cart with plastic.

It wasn't until I think the pandemic, really made me slow down and think that it's possible to live differently and it's possible to help other people live differently.

I had also been waiting for a shop like this to open in San Francisco for years and I thought, ‘well, if nobody else is gonna do it, it's gonna be me.’

**Ellisa Feinstein (Host):** By many definitions, a closed-loop economy incorporates eliminating waste and circulating materials. Can you tell me more about Simple and what it means to be zero waste and how this ties back into your mission of supporting a closed-loop economic model?

**Abbe Clemons (Guest):** So, being zero waste, that's kind of a catchphrase. I like to say low waste because I do have a tiny little garbage can on the checkout counter at Simple. But being zero or low waste means that you look at the very beginning of a product and ensure that there was no unnecessary plastic or other packaging that will end up in the waste stream. So we at Simple spent years looking at every business that we work with and making sure that there was no greenwashing in the process, which means that maybe something was wrapped in plastic at one time and it was taken off and then wrapped in paper just to make it look like it was environmentally friendly.

We also made sure that all of the refillable products are from businesses that take back the empty containers and sanitize them and send them back full. So that's part of the closed-loop economic model, where things are produced and used and that continues in a circular fashion.

**Ellisa Feinstein (Host):** I take it that it's been a bit challenging finding some of these retailers and local makers that provide a real low-waste product. Can you tell me more about that?

**Abbe Clemons (Guest):** Yeah, it hasn't been easy, but the hopeful part is there are some businesses, maybe more than you would think, that are doing it and that do have a very eco-minded mission. Some companies are doing some interesting things with plastic bags that then get folded and sent back and reused.

**Ellisa Feinstein (Host):** When assessing whether or not something is sustainable, what should people really be focusing on?

**Abbe Clemons (Guest):** The most obvious one is the packaging. Does it come in plastic? Was it wrapped in plastic at one point? Is it in a container that can't be reused or repurposed? Unfortunately plastic recycling is not the answer. Very little plastic is actually recycled. And then you have to think about the ingredients. You know, is it palm oil-free? Has it harmed the environment at any point when the ingredients were harvested? And then thirdly, I would say just that the treatment of the workers that are involved in the making of the product.

**Ellisa Feinstein (Host):** How does an average consumer even go about looking for these types of criteria before they buy something?

**Abbe Clemons (Guest):** I think that's one benefit of small businesses, because the business owners, and in this case myself, I did all the research so people can come into Simple and be really confident that everything that they buy in the shop they can feel good about.

The average consumer when they buy. I think just buying from small businesses is the best thing you can do. I know it's not always the best deal but people just need to take a minute, have some intention in their purchases, even if it's a mundane purchase. It really does matter. How we spend our money speaks volumes.

**Ellisa Feinstein (Host):** What are some of your recommendations for those of us who want to give something meaningful but is also more green?

**Abbe Clemons (Guest):** I just love a useful gift, something that you will use and enjoy, but you wouldn't necessarily splurge on it for yourself, like a beautiful facial steam or a bath salt or something like that, that is packaged in a beautiful glass container that can be repurposed. I also am a big fan of gifting the experience - the membership to a museum or something like that.

We have a lot of things in Simple that are gifting items. I'm thinking of one company: a friend of mine makes bags that are produced in a zero waste manufacturing facility and it's beautiful bread bags and wine totes. And other companies - there's a store in the Mission that makes amazing candles and diffusers that they refill for half price. So you can still get those gifty items that have the intentionality and the sustainability factor attached to them.

**Ellisa Feinstein (Host):** What are some of your other favorite sustainable product lines?

**Abbe Clemons (Guest):** I literally am carrying products from people that live two blocks from the store. Like beautiful mugs with Sutro Tower and different San Francisco icons screen-printed on them. And candles that are repurposed from old wine bottles from a company just outside of the Bay Area in Truckee. There is a company that makes really beautiful things for the home: everything's packaged in cardboards so it can be composted.

We have butterfly razors from a local Bay Area company that are packaged in burlap and they come with 10 straight-edge razors. Those straight-edge razors, after they're used, are then melted down and turned into to-go utensils.

So even things that you don't necessarily think are a giftable item really can be.

**Ellisa Feinstein (Host):** What are other ideas for gifts that are really eco-friendly?

**Abbe Clemons (Guest):** I think thrifting is fun - gifting homemade items, local items. Somebody bought out all of my bamboo lids that go on top of just a standard mason jar. She was making kits for all of her friends but she was gonna fill the mason jar with baking goods or homemade granola or a craft kit, and then she was going to put these beautiful bamboo lids on it. So it's a gift inside of a beautiful jar that can then be used to refill with something: it's completely zero waste.

**Ellisa Feinstein (Host):** Why do you think it is so important to shop locally?

**Abbe Clemons (Guest):** Well, I think now, especially after COVID, when we have seen all the vacant storefronts, I think it really puts into focus the importance of community and how small businesses are the heart of communities.

**Ellisa Feinstein (Host):** And how would you think that creating community actually ties back into being more conscious about the environment?

**Abbe Clemons (Guest):** It helps people to have conversations. Part of our community-building is going to be doing workshops and popups and having people come in and do talks about

different, environmentally related topics. It's all related: slowing down in your everyday, thinking about what you're buying, how you're spending your time, and it's all conducive to a better way of life.

**Ellisa Feinstein (Host):** What do you think about the groups, which are some of my favorites, like Buy Nothing and Facebook Marketplace, or other places like Craigslist, where you can get free items?

**Abbe Clemons (Guest):** Yes, I love it. I sourced pretty much all of my furnishings in Simple from places like that because I was really trying to not buy new. One of my displays, I literally found on the street corner - so a big fan of those groups.

**Ellisa Feinstein (Host):** How about recommendations for special occasions like baby showers or birthdays?

**Abbe Clemons (Guest):** I go right to self care when you say baby shower. I love little bundles, whether it's a theme of color. If you know the person's favorite color, you could do a beautiful conject sponge with a facial bar with a shower steamer and a couple reusable makeup removers. If you have a kid's birthday party, we have recycled, colored pencils made out of old newspapers. And a friend of mine made these beautiful journals that she used recycled paper and did beautiful art on the front.

**Ellisa Feinstein (Host):** So if you want to use a recyclable or reusable or upcycled type of wrapping, what would you recommend?

**Abbe Clemons (Guest):** Go to the fabric store and buy the fabric remnants and cut squares out of them and do beautiful folds and add some greenery and use repurposed twine. You could also use a bag that's meant for something else, like a beautiful produce bag or a bread bag and the bag itself is the wrapping but it's also part of the gift. I love that idea of the double-use. Also if you're like me, I have 20,000 bandanas laying around my house so that's another really good wrapping option.

If you're open to the idea, even if you only swap out your dishwashing detergent or your laundry detergent, which is a really easy swap, that's a win. So I think we can't make ourselves or our family members feel deprived of anything because that's just gonna make you feel resentful to the whole thing. Nobody is being judged. I just wanna offer an alternative but hopefully it's such an easy alternative that it just becomes a natural part of your life.

**Ellisa Feinstein (Host):** How would you say that your work with Simple contributes to our greater goals of addressing the climate crisis?

**Abbe Clemons (Guest):** I think it's just small steps: in three and a half weeks we diverted almost 250 plastic bottles from the landfill due to refills at Simple. And there's a lot of other shops like mine throughout the country and even in the Bay Area.

And so cumulatively, that number is pretty large and we can just continue with the education part and the community-building part. I think just getting people thinking about it, switching mindsets even just a little bit, they might start with one refill, but then they might be rethinking other aspects of their lives. And if if people are thinking about it and spending their money differently, corporations will eventually have to listen and that would bring about larger change.

**Ellisa Feinstein (Host):** It sounds like you have a lot of great ideas and appreciate you sharing recommendations on Everyday Climate Champions.

**Abbe Clemons (Guest):** It's been so fun. Thank you so much.

**Ellisa Feinstein (Host):** Hey listeners, for links to Simple and other resources mentioned during this episode, check out the show notes below.

**Ellisa Feinstein (Host):** For this episode of Everyday Climate Champions, the sound designer was Kayla Anchell and the Executive Producer and Editor was Dalya Massachi. I am Ellisa Feinstein. Our full production team is listed below in the show notes. Music in this episode is by Blue Dot Sessions.