

Communicating Change: What Can We Learn from a Pair of Bean Boots

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By Allison Cohen

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As organization, often steeped in history and tradition, we tend to shy away from making big, sweeping changes because let's face it, CHANGE IS HARD. But it is also good (really, really, good). As with most things the anticipation of the change is often worse than the change itself.

We are at a point in time where movements like #metoo, #timesup and #enough are giving us the opportunity to pause and re-examine our organizational policies and procedures. And as Jewish organizations, our funders and partners are calling for it through collaborative efforts like the [Partnership](#). Often, change can create happier customers, donors and employees, resulting in stronger brand loyalty.

In early February, LL Bean changed its longstanding return policy, which had offered customers a lifetime product replacement. What struck me about the announcement was the honesty and simplicity.

As we collectively embark on what is going to be seasons of change, don't just think about the policies themselves, make communicating it a priority. There is much we can all learn from this short announcement when changing a long-standing policy or tradition.

- **MISSION.** Relate changes back to your mission, discuss how the changes will get you closer to achieving your overall goals.
- **WHY.** Giving the why helps create the feeling that the changes are inarguable and to help everyone and helps those that are affected understand the changes.
- **TRANSPARENCY.** Show a little vulnerability and how you are adapting.
- **GIVE YOURSELF CREDIT.** LL Bean still has one of the best return policies in retail and they aren't afraid to share it. Take the opportunity to reinforce what you do well.
- **BE ASPIRATIONAL.** By changing the policy, but still having on of the best return policies in retail, LL Bean's policy remains on that others want to emulate.
- **STICK TO YOUR GUNS + STAY ON MESSAGE.** There is going to be pushback. Make sure everyone and everything (from Facebook comment responses to phone conversations) stay on message while allowing your constituents to be heard.

We can all learn from how great businesses and organizations – big and small – create and share difficult decisions. LL Beans letter is a case study on communication done well.

Allison Cohen is the Principal of [Orange Door Strategies](#) – a branding and marketing agency. Orange Door works with ambitious small businesses, nonprofits and overnight + day camps eager to build magnetic brands. Her passion is to create ways for your business to stand out, help you think different about growing your business, and build bold brands. She has an affinity for meaningful work and a desire to partner with people who think and dream big. [orangedoorstrategies.com](#)



L.L.Bean

February 9 · 🌐



A Letter to Our Customers,

Since 1912, our mission has been to sell high-quality products that inspire and enable people to enjoy the outdoors. Our commitment to customer service has earned us your trust and respect, as has our guarantee, which ensures that we stand behind everything we sell.

Increasingly, a small, but growing number of customers has been interpreting our guarantee well beyond its original intent. Some view it as a lifetime product replacement program, expecting refunds for heavily worn products used over many years. Others seek refunds for products that have been purchased through third parties, such as at yard sales.

Based on these experiences, we have updated our policy. Customers will have one year after purchasing an item to return it, accompanied by proof of purchase. After one year, we will work with our customers to reach a fair solution if a product is defective in any way.

This update adds clarity to our policy and will only affect a small percentage of returns. It will also ensure we can continue to honor one of the best guarantees in retail, with no impact for the vast majority of our customers. To learn more, please view our full return policy at [llbean.com](#).

L.L.Bean has stood for quality, service, trust, and getting people outdoors ever since my great-grandfather founded our company over 100 years ago - and that will never change. Thank you for being a loyal customer and we look forward to continuing to inspire and enable you to Be an Outsider.

Sincerely,

Shawn O. Gorman

L.L.Bean Executive Chairman