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I interview celebrities, entrepreneurs and authors.

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## Woody Harrelson: Reinventing The Way Paper Is Made With Only 20% Wood

I recently caught up with Woody Harrelson, who is changing the way paper is made with his partner, Jeff Golfman. Their company is called [Step Forward Paper](#) and their paper is made out of 80 percent wheat-straw waste and 20 percent Forest Stewardship Council certified wood fiber. They claim that buying two boxes of their paper saves one tree. Recently, their paper has been made available in the U.S. exclusively at Staples.



Woody Harrelson

Harrelson, who has made his career with his breakout role in the television sitcom “Cheers” and in the movie’s “White Men Can’t Jump” and “Natural Born Killers”, has always rallied against deforestation and this paper is his answer.

Rather than trying to stop companies from cutting down trees, he is revolutionizing the entire industry. He believes that in the future, his company will be able to make trees without wood at all.

I sat down with Woody and his partner Jeff to talk about how they started their company, the impact they’ve had so far, if they see their paper replacing traditional paper and their best advice to aspiring entrepreneurs.

### **When did you first become passionate about protecting forests and what were your first steps to try and stop deforestation?**

Woody Harrelson: When I was 12 years old in 6th grade, I did a paper. It couldn’t be more than five pages and you could choose the subject you wanted to do it on. I wrote about the ecological situation and what was going on in the forests and it ended up being a fifty-page paper. I couldn’t stop writing about everything I was learning. I was really fascinated by everything that was going on – the devastation of the forests and ecological degradation. That was my early interest.

It was later when I was doing Cheers that John Ratzenberger came back and he said to the cast of Cheers “did you guys know that when you’re driving

through the national forest, there's a one hundred yard strip of trees to make it look beautiful and in back of that it's all clear cut. We couldn't even take in that information. But the fact is that he was absolutely right. Timber companies were and are allowed to come into the forest and cut down our trees out of our national forest, we build the roads for them and our tax dollars heavily subsidize them.

It's an absolutely abominable practice that's been going on for years and years and years. It's a huge industry. The paper industry is a \$200 billion dollar a year industry and the paper demand right now is 400 million metric tons per year and that's growing. In fifteen years that's going to double in spite of this idea of a paperless office.

The next big step for me was when in 1992 I read in the LA Times that they were offering up six million acres of ancient forest in Montana to various industries and congress was trying to pass this bill. I got really upset about it and called my friend Peter Bahouth from Greenpeace and tried to stop it. While I was working on this campaign with him, I realized that even if you stop them from cutting this forest or that forest, they will cut down something else. It's like the game wack-a-mole. The only real solution is to change the way paper is made because half of the trees cut in the world go to paper.

That's why this to me is a revolutionary thing. 80 percent wheat straw – it's an extraordinary, groundbreaking, amazing thing. I've been working on it for years with Jeff Golfman and it's finally available.

**How did you come together with Jeff in the first place? What did you find in your experiments making paper without wood pulp? Are there any drawbacks to not using 100 percent wood?**

Woody Harrelson: Our paper doesn't have any drawbacks and it meets all the specifications for printing that it needs to. It's unremarkable in a sense because you can't tell any difference between our paper and regular wood paper. We sell it for the same price as recycled paper now.

Once we have our state-of-the-art eco mill built in the next three to five years up in Winnipeg using all of the agricultural waste from the farmers, it's going to be 100 percent non-wood. It will also be the same price or less than wood based paper.

Instead of putting out fires, you have to change the paradigm. Once I realized that, I went to a guy who was meant to be a non-wood expert and he pointed me to Jeff Golfman and said that this is the guy to hitch your wagon to and I'm glad I did because he did a remarkable job. The cool thing is that two boxes of this paper saves a tree.

**What impact has your company had so far? How many forests have you saved?**

Woody Harrelson: Jeff should respond to this one.

Jeff Golfman: We actually have a counter on our website where we are counting how many trees and pounds of CO2 have been saved through the purchase of our tree-friendly paper. You can visit the page and count how many trees and GHG you'll save if you switch to our paper. Right now, we're close to 3,000 trees that we've saved but we've only launched a few months ago. Our goal is to get up to millions of trees saved over time.

Woody Harrelson: That's the other really significant thing. In terms of impact of ancient forests, we have seven out of ten of the biggest forests in Canada and they are being heavily cut right now. Those forests are carbon sinks dealing with one fifth of the carbon in the atmosphere.

**Do you see this paper replacing traditional paper in the future?  
What is your vision for what this could become on a global scale?**

Woody Harrelson: Four hundred million metric tons a year is how much paper we use. It will take a while before we can meet that kind of supply. I want to start the revolution and grow naturally and organically and eventually make our own mill. When we're able to make this paper the same cost as wood based paper there will be a tipping point in our sales. I think it will be in three to five years. When that happens, then we're really going to make a dent in this revolutionary paper market.

This paper is now available at Staples and it's a great start. It's 80 percent wheat straw and our goal is 100 percent non-wood and that's not too far in the distance for us.

**What are your top pieces of advice for people who want to be entrepreneurs like yourself?**

Woody Harrelson:

1. You have to focus on what you're passionate about. For me it's the forests and of course, because I'm concerned about the forests, I'm concerned about the way paper is made.
2. Find someone, the way I found Jeff, who shares the same passion and vision.
3. Try to do something every day about it. We've been working on this for fifteen years together.
4. Keep hammering away because it's not going to happen overnight. These industries didn't develop the way they developed just over night. The change won't develop over night.

Jeff Golfman:

1. It has to be something you're totally passionate about. It has to be something you're willing to work on day and night, 24-7-365. It has to be something you don't actually consider as work. I don't believe I work a minute in my life because I'm so engaged and thrilled and excited about what I'm doing. It's what I do because I want to make a difference.
2. Have an amazing team of people around you. If it wasn't for the team we have, we wouldn't be here today. If it wasn't for people like Woody, our investors, board of directors, staff, suppliers, distributors and sub-contractors, we wouldn't be here. It's all about team and everyone working together for the collective vision.
3. Make sure you have the right amount of capitalization in financing to pull off your vision. 90 percent of entrepreneurs don't have the legs to finish the race or if they do they don't finish in the optimal way.

***Dan Schawbel is the author of the upcoming book, [Promote Yourself: The New Rules For Career Success](#) (St. Martin's Press, Sept 3rd).***

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<http://www.forbes.com/sites/danschawbel/2013/06/24/woody-harrelson-reinventing-the-way-paper-is-made-with-only-20-wood/>