

# The most sustainable product is the one you don't replace

By Melinda D. Whittington, Chair, President and Chief Executive Officer at La-Z-Boy Inc.

Durability should always remain at the forefront of sustainability, but we rarely see it in that way. In today's current cultural landscape of fast consumption, most products are designed to be quickly replaced by the next best thing, not relied on. While the industry has slightly shifted in favor of discussing sustainability, they more so focus on materials or packaging rather than the whole lifecycle of a product. If the goal is to be serious and make a more permanent change towards reducing waste, the shift should spotlight not just what is made and how, but how long it lasts.

## **The normalization of replacement over longevity**

The rate at which people are used to replacing everyday products has silently and gradually become the norm. Furniture has not been the exception. According to the [U.S. Environmental Protection Agency](#), millions of tons of furniture waste yearly ends up in landfills. Much of which is wrongfully discarded long before its functional life is truly over.

This is not singularly an environmental issue, it's a design issue. Many products on the market today are created with short-term use in mind, prioritizing trend cycles in culture over long-term value. The result of this is a system where replacement seems easier and more normalized than repair.

## **Durability as a responsibility, not a feature**

At [La-Z-Boy](#), we've believed for almost 100-years that durability is not just a selling point for customers to be excited about, it's a responsibility we take seriously as a mandatory factor in production. Since 1927, our main focus has been on building furniture that people can depend on over time. That approach has majorly been about comfort and craftsmanship, but also about the bigger picture of reducing the need for continuous replacement.

A product that has a longer life span reduces waste, lowers demand for new resources, and changes how consumers define value. A chair that remains as functional and comfortable for years after purchasing is not just more practical, it is infinitely more sustainable.

## **Sustainability and performance are now connected**

This conversation matters even more as the constantly evolving consumer behavior continues to shift. Younger generations, especially Gen Z and older Gen Alpha, are both sustainability-minded and performance-driven when making purchasing decisions. They are not just thinking about what they buy, but how it continuously will fit into how they live.

Gaming is a super strong example of this shift. According to [Deloitte](#), Gen Z gamers spend an average of eight hours per week gaming, frequently in extended sessions that require sustained focus and thrive on physical support.

That extended level of use changes the expectations of a product. It's no longer enough for something to look aesthetically pleasing or perform well in the moment, it has to perform and last over time. Comfort, durability, and support has become part of the performance itself. This is

really where sustainability and performance intersect. While a product built to last is positive for the environment, it is also positive for the user.

### **What's next?**

If we want to make meaningful progress on sustainability, which we do, we need to move beyond short-term solutions and focus on long-term thinking. This means developing products that people not only want to but can keep, instead of replace. This looks like prioritizing durability alongside innovation and not sacrificing one for the other, redefining value, not as something temporary, but as something that improves with time. The future is not about false product claims but about real changes and developments that are promises to extend the longevity and enjoyment of products.

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### **Strategy Note:**

This thought leadership focuses on durability as a core part of sustainability because it naturally aligns with *La-Z-Boy's* long-standing identity around comfort, quality, and long-term use. Instead of taking a more expected route like materials or packaging, the message shifts the conversation to product lifespan, which feels more differentiated and honest, appealing more heavily to Gen Z and Alpha consumers who are curious about authenticity. It also connects back to the broader campaign idea of endurance and performance, especially with Gen Z gaming

habits, without directly advertising or pushing the chair. Overall, the goal was to position the brand as thoughtful and credible in the sustainability space, not promotional.