



ClimateTech

SPOTLIGHT INTERVIEW

with Stephen Murphy, ClimateTech

Raphael Güller, Founder, Sweep

Q: Who is Raphael Güller?

RG: I've worn many different hats over the years and it might seem a little random: From studying business, to consulting major international brands on marketing and storytelling, to becoming a self-taught designer, running a little agency combining insights from design and consumer psychology, to helping scale the in-house agency at Zendesk.

But on this latest mission, it all seems to come together magically. And with real purpose. Reducing carbon emissions is the biggest challenge of our times, and it requires multidisciplinary thinking.

Q: Why carbon accounting?

RG: Carbon accounting is key to creating transparency and accountability. The old adage is that you can't manage what you can't measure, and it holds true here too. Understanding the what and where is key. It won't be long before every company will have to account for emissions just like they do for their financials.

Just accounting is not enough though. We can measure all we want, it's useless if we don't act. Which is why we optimise our tool for large emitters, help them coordinate efforts, and tap into their value chains, leveraging networks to get companies to support (and nudge) each other to change.

Q: Key milestones to date?

RG: It might sound a little trite, but I'd say our biggest achievement so far is surrounding ourselves with brilliant people. We're now 60 staff across Europe and the US, with many more to join us before the end of the year.

We've had the fortune to work with really smart customers that have been at the forefront of corporate climate action for years, helping us build a tool that matches the complexity of the task at hand.

We have excellent advisors and are part of leading networks such as the World Bank's Carbon Leadership Pricing Coalition or Climate Dividends (an initiative we just launched with Ademe, KPMG and Carbon4).

I think it's all these relationships that allowed us to scale so quickly and raise \$100m over the last 12 months, with some of the best investors in the US and Europe.

I'm not a founder type to chase some inflated growth goals for the sake of it, but with the climate crisis, we have to think really big really fast. We're here to give it our all.

Q: Advice to early-stage founders?

RG: To keep it grounded (and plug Sweep yet again, yes): We're lucky to be a founding team of four repeat entrepreneurs and all of them inspire me, every day. We're quite complementary in skills and experiences and really challenge and push each other.

In terms of tech royalty, I think what the Collison brothers built at Stripe is fascinating. They also really pushed the boundaries in terms of corporate climate action. Their first purchase of negative carbon was a big eye opener for us as we were thinking about starting Sweep, seeing that companies can take big steps towards the future and influencing other businesses to follow along.

Also, yes, I have an OCD designer mind, so certainly Steve Jobs, too. I try to be more Swiss democratic than dictatorial in style though.

Q: RG: Shout-out to any great investors who have supported you?

RG: All of our Sweep investors, really. We've been lucky to be able to choose, and we did so deliberately. We've surrounded ourselves with complementary networks, opinions and skills. Traditional VCs, impact funds, connections to large industrial companies (the dirty ones, yes, that's a positive for us because here we can make a real difference).

They all bring something crucial to the table. So, thanks so much Coatue, Balderton, 2050, La Famiglia and New Wave.

And, yes, Steve Jobs again, thanks so much Tony Fadell, inventor of the iPhone, for supporting us, too!

Q: Advice to early-stage founders? ?

RG: Welcome to the rollercoaster! A founder's life is constantly up and down, oscillating between 'Amazing! We're on top of the world' and 'Oh wow, here's a twist and turn'. Sometimes several times a day as you hop between meetings.

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Remind yourself that we usually achieve much less than we think right away, and much more over time. Starting a company is a marathon. So, finding ways to get off the ride, slow down, balance things out (for example by having great cofounders that can share the load) and seeing the bigger picture is key.

Also, yes, always think: Will this scale? And what is the 20% achieving the 80% here?

Q: Optimistic or pessimistic?

RG: Optimistic. Stubbornly so. We have the solutions, we just need to implement them. Yes, we've all been way too slow to get going, but now you can feel the momentum building on all fronts.

Do you know that video of the dancing guy? He's dancing all alone on a hill, looking like a weirdo. But some folks join him, and suddenly there is this moment where everyone around them feels like they have to join in too. An explosion of joy. I think we're almost at that tipping point.

We get so many applications every day from smart people at the top of their game wanting to work on this challenge. The movement to build a better, greener world is picking up speed, it's so rewarding for those who join it, and once we're in full dance mode, there will be no turning back. Where should the onus of climate responsibility lie – consumers, businesses or policy makers?

On all three. The scale of the climate crisis requires collaboration and action from everyone. And each of the players influences the other in constant feedback loops.

For example: We're all consumers and workers. What we learn privately, we bring to the workplace. We put pressure on our employers. Some employers want to act. But they can't if legislation won't change the rules that make it hard to run a successful business in a climate-positive way. And governments won't implement legislation if they don't believe what we are asking from companies isn't realistic and achievable. Which is why it is important that companies like Sweep show it's possible: be really successful while doing the right thing.

Everything is connected. And every step in the right direction, whether small or big - and however imperfect - matters. Keep pushing!

Q: Thoughts on British government or Innovate UK?

RG: We're a French company on paper, with a sizeable team across both sides of the Atlantic. Clearly there is much that could be improved in terms of how the current UK government (and most governments across Europe) are tackling the climate crisis. The list is very long.

But coming back to being stubborn optimists, and having learnt the basic psychology that positive reinforcement is much more impactful, I'd rather celebrate what's good and ask for more of that. So, please, more pioneering moves legislating carbon disclosures and actions, even less coal, even more wind farms, and please please, even more transparency.

Q: Anything else?

RG: Keep pushing!

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