

Q&A

Off the Cuff: A Q&A with Positive Luxury's James Edney

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James Edney joined Positive Luxury as its client director in May. Image courtesy of Positive Luxury

By AMIRAH KEATON

Introducing "Off the Cuff," a new Q&A series from Luxury Daily exploring the career paths, current projects and next steps of those shaping the world's best luxury brands.

The interviews feature a Proust-style twist, allowing readers to get to know industry leaders on a personal level. The sixth edition features James Edney, client director at Positive Luxury.

In this Q&A, Mr. Edney discusses how joining the team behind **The Butterfly Mark**, an independent accreditation for industry brands adhering to the highest sustainability standards, this past May has been going and touches upon Positive Luxury LABS, a bespoke consultancy specializing in strengthening corporate ESG strategies across six key categories launched July 1. Here is the dialogue:



Positive Luxury LABS experts consult across six key luxury categories: beauty and fragrance, jewelry and watches, travel and hospitality, fashion and accessories, premium drinks and interiors and living. Image courtesy of Positive Luxury

What was your first job? What did it teach you?

I have worked in sustainability for over 16 years, and I spent the first seven years of my career working in the real estate sector;

my first role was as an environmental analyst.

As well as learning what it meant to be a professional, it was invaluable learning about the importance of credible and robust data.

Today, companies must navigate fears of greenwashing and disclose their sustainability performance to ever higher levels of scrutiny and interest. My first role exposed me to the rigor necessary to set targets, back up communication with data and insight, and engage commercial and investor audiences with relevant content.

If anything, to get leadership committed to bold action on sustainability, those skills are even more important today than they were then.

Which skills have been critical to your success? Did you gain these skills within or outside of the workplace?

I have learned the value of being adaptable and very comfortable with change and uncertainty. Without those attributes, it can be hard to work in this space.

The variety of work we get to do as consultants is rewarding and exciting. Everything we do at Positive Luxury is bespoke to our clients which means no project or challenge is ever the same.

I think you also must be ambitious and positive about what your clients can achieve. Often, our role is to elevate the level of ambition and excite our clients, so we need to constantly raise the ceiling of what they can imagine is possible.

What is the best piece of advice you have ever received?

I recently had some coaching, and it was a great learning experience to explore what I need to be at my best and how I can show up as a leader.

One of the learnings and pieces of advice to come out of that was to be kind to myself. It is a message I have shared liberally in the year since.

Working in fast-paced, dynamic environments is very rewarding, and even though mental health and wellbeing are established topics today, I still see people loading themselves up with pressure and demanding so much of themselves.

Sustainability is such a vocation and people working in it are incredibly committed, but for me, it is so important to remember to be kind to yourself both inside and outside of work.

How has your field changed since you started out in luxury, and what do you think the industry will look like in a decade?

I am excited to see more luxury brands playing a leadership role in sustainability.

There are some businesses that sustainability leaders already look to regardless of their industry, like Kering, but there is so much potential for more luxury businesses to lead on really important topics like biodiversity and innovation in particular.

What recent projects have reignited your passion for working in luxury? Are you excited about any upcoming Positive Luxury launches?

I am excited by how Positive Luxury has developed our consulting offer to help luxury businesses more holistically on their sustainability journeys.

It is through our clients that we have an impact, and we are continuously thinking about the support we are able to provide to help our clients maximize their impact, build trust and drive real business value.

Building on the foundation of the Butterfly Mark, we are now set up to provide a strategic layer of support. So, when a luxury business is thinking of sustainability, we are here to help them see how that plays a role in enhancing their brand, how to communicate with credibility and confidence and how it can help transform the luxury sector.

We created the Butterfly Mark as the mark of real change. For a world that desperately needs it.

Show the world what real change looks like.

Choose the Butterfly. pic.twitter.com/l3oHJmnpO

Who in any industry or sphere would you most like to share a long lunch with, and where would you take them?

I think it would be Arnold Schwarzenegger. The drive, motivation and will to succeed that he has demonstrated over such a long and varied career is inspiring.

He is far from perfect as an individual, but he has relentlessly bettered himself and put himself in a position to exert enormous positive influence.

I am not sure where we would go for lunch, but ideally, somewhere with live music and great food -- I would happily defer to Arnie for recommendations.

How do you get into the right mindset before a big meeting or presentation?

One of the most important things for me is to ensure I know the story I am going to tell.

Great presentations are built around stories, and even within meetings, storytelling is incredibly powerful. Before a big meeting, I am focused on the story and remind myself what an incredible opportunity presenting or speaking is.

It is a chance to engage, inspire and motivate I remind myself of what motivates me to ensure I am not just reading from a slide but actually believing in the message I am communicating.

On your days off, what can you be found doing to relax or have some fun?

As a dad of two young children, I do not really get days off, if I am honest!

When I do get pockets of time, I can almost certainly be found reading or drawing. I have realized that in a room full of strategists, I am often one of the most creative and despite being awful at art in school, I have found having a creative outlet a great way to relax and look after my mental health.

Anyone looking for unsolicited book recommendations should check out "Riddley Walker" by Russell Hoban and "Great Apes" by Will Self.

What does luxury mean to you?

Time. When I think of luxury in any context, I am drawn to the time involved in the craftsmanship, the patience and the dedication shown by these incredible people to conceive and create, whatever the end product might be.

Luxury is often associated with legacy, quality and longevity, and that does not happen in highly commoditized, high-volume industries.

Whether a product or experience, what is your favorite luxury indulgence?

Time, in a way, is the epitome of luxury. As I have grown older, as cliched as it might be, my time is the thing I value highest and have very little of to spare.

When I can create those moments to pause and be really deliberate with my time, it feels like a luxury, whether I indulge it to follow a passion or share it with others.