



UL RESPONSIBLE SOURCING

"An Interview with Kimberly Almeida, The Levi Strauss Foundation's Senior Program Manager"



Levi Strauss & Co.'s Worker Well-being Initiative – Improving workers' lives and return on business.

In celebration of World Day for Safety and Health at Work, UL asks Kimberly Almeida, Senior Program Manager for the Levi Strauss Foundation, about the successful implementation of the Worker Well-being Initiative and how other businesses can follow suit and address workers' needs.

UL: What was the impetus for this initiative that started back in 2012?

Kimberly Almeida: In 2012 we celebrated the 20th anniversary of our code of conduct (known as Terms of Engagement). This milestone prompted us to reflect on what we'd learned as a company and as an industry. Also, the Levi Strauss Foundation had invested close to \$10 million in workplace-based programs in our supply chain, but we realized none of these programs continued past our support – meaning none had been sustained by suppliers.

Levi Strauss & Co. (LS&Co.) determined it was time to do things differently and make compliance the floor and not the ceiling of what our business would promote. And so, the [Worker Well-being Initiative](#) was born.

UL: Were there any roadblocks to roll out and implementation of this program?

Kimberly Almeida: Yes, of course! We first piloted this new approach with five vendors in five challenging countries. We started by understanding worker needs by conducting a worker survey and responded by implementing programs that addressed key needs. The pilots provided insights on vendor engagement and ownership, business integration and program implementation. During the pilot phase, which lasted two years, we really were able to hone in on what worked and in some cases what didn't – we learned as much from our successes as by our challenges.

UL: What would you say are key requirements for success of these types of supply chain initiatives?

Kimberly Almeida: It's hard to list just a few, but in my experience I would say patience, determination and flexibility are key. Through the pilot programs we learned that we couldn't always do everything our way; rather, we needed to truly partner and support our vendors, because in the end they are the ones who need to see the value of investing in their workers' health and well-being. This requires us to be patient and let the vendor lead, while we provide support and in some cases co-funding for programs.



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UL: How easy is it to get something like this started, especially if you think of smaller companies who have less resources?

Kimberly Almeida: I am a big advocate of piloting ideas. The Worker Well-being program didn't start as a big, supply-chain wide initiative, rather, we piloted, tested, learned what worked and then once we had a better idea of what worked we scaled. So for smaller companies I would encourage them to pilot with one vendor who is a trusted partner. We also have [proof](#) that investments in worker well-being generate compelling business and social returns, generating value for workers, vendors and LS&Co.

Furthermore, take advantage of our program tools! In October 2016, our CEO Chip Bergh [announced](#) that LS&Co. is sharing our program guidebook, worker surveys and program lessons and impacts publicly. Ultimately we believe this initiative will serve as a catalyst to transform the industry by setting a new standard for sustainable labor practices.

UL: Where is the initiative at now and where are you headed?

Kimberly Almeida: We are now scaling the initiative across our supply chain; the message to our vendors is simple; we expect them to partner with us to address worker well-being. By 2020, our goal is for 80% of LS&Co. product volume to be produced by suppliers that are investing in worker well-being. As of 2016, we've reached close to 100,000 workers and 60% of our volume.

We're also excited to be co-sponsoring (along with Target) the first [Forum on Well-being in Supply Chains](#) this summer, which will take place at Harvard University. Anyone who is interested in this topic is invited to join us!

To read more interviews by UL Responsible Sourcing with industry leaders, please [click here](#)

About UL Responsible Sourcing:

UL is a leading global provider of responsible sourcing auditing and advisory services, which include supply chain monitoring, research, program development, and training. UL's Responsible Sourcing team has the global footprint to provide services in several countries.

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