

Thought-leadership Piece

Stop calling disposable furniture “affordable”

By Melinda Whittington

The furniture industry has a language problem.

For too long, too many people have treated “affordable” as a polite synonym for “replaceable.” Buy it fast. Use it hard. Toss it early. Then do it again. That may be convenient for the quarterly sales cycle, but it is terrible for households, terrible for trust, and terrible for the planet.

I do not believe sustainability in furniture starts with a slogan. I believe it starts with a tougher question: Was this product made to last?

At La-Z-Boy, we have spent nearly a century building a business around comfort, quality, and craftsmanship. That history does not make us perfect, but it does make our position clear. In a category filled with shortcuts, durability is not old-fashioned. It is responsible. La-Z-Boy says about 90 percent of its products are made in North America, and the company continues to frame its brand around long-lasting, custom furniture rather than fast-turn, disposable home goods (Klaer, 2025).

That is why one of the most important parts of our sustainability work is reducing waste across our manufacturing system. In La-Z-Boy’s fiscal 2024 impact reporting, we said we reached a 96 percent recycling rate for non-hazardous waste and cut hazardous waste generation by 20 percent year over year (Klaer, 2025). The company has also tied its long-term sustainability strategy to resource efficiency, supply chain improvement, and operational waste reduction.

Those numbers matter. But let me be blunt: Recycling is not a permission slip for bad design.

The most sustainable furniture is often the furniture a family keeps. The chair that survives moves, pets, movie nights, and changing apartments. The sofa that is still in the room years later because it was worth keeping in the first place. If this industry is serious about sustainability, it has to stop pretending the solution begins at the landfill. It begins much earlier — with better materials, better construction, and better standards for what we ask consumers to bring into their homes.

This is not just an environmental argument. It is a value argument. When a customer buys furniture, they are not buying packaging and promotion. They are buying years of use. If the product gives out early, the environmental cost is obvious, but so is the human one. People should not have to choose between price and pride. They should not be trained to expect disappointment from the things they use every day.

The good news is that this industry already knows how to do better. We know how to source more responsibly. Years ago, La-Z-Boy reported sourcing more than 74 percent of its wood from renewable, plantation-grown sources and earning a high score on the Wood Furniture Scorecard, while also highlighting GREENGUARD Gold certification for low VOC emissions (Lazboy, 2022). Those are the kinds of choices that should move from nice-to-have to baseline expectation.

I also believe manufacturers need to stop hiding behind the excuse that consumers only want cheap furniture. Consumers want fairness. They want comfort. They want design. They want something that feels worth the money they worked hard to earn. And increasingly, they want brands that act like waste is a design failure, not just a disposal issue.

That is the standard we should be held to. Not whether we can make furniture faster. Whether we can make it better, cleaner, and longer-lasting.

Sustainability should not be a side page in a corporate report. In our industry, it should be visible in every frame, every material decision, every supply chain choice, and every product promise. Because in the end, furniture is not meant to be temporary. Homes are where people build their lives. The things we put in them should be built with more respect than a trend cycle.

And yes, that may require this industry to unlearn a profitable habit.

Good. It is time.

Strategy note:

This thought-leadership piece is designed to strengthen La-Z-Boy's brand identity by linking the company's long-standing reputation for comfort, craftsmanship, and quality with a clear sustainability position. Instead of discussing ESG in a broad or generic way, the piece focuses on one specific idea: durable furniture is a more responsible choice than disposable furniture. That approach fits La-Z-Boy well because the brand already stands for long-term comfort and well-made products. Strategically, the message helps La-Z-Boy sound credible, not opportunistic. It shows that sustainability is not separate from the brand's business model, but closely connected to how the company designs, makes, and sells furniture. The strong tone also helps the piece stand out in a major publication by giving the CEO a confident point of view rather than a safe corporate voice.