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RADICAL RENEGADE

## RADICAL RENEGADE FT. ISABEL VARELA



BLOGRISE | 2 YEARS AGO

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*Rise's Radical Renegade is a monthly series featuring interviews with trailblazing career mavens. Meet Isabel Varela, CEO of Isabel Varela – a company who's mission is to increase the physical and psychological effects that fashion has on the environment through art, film, and education. Isabel is a sustainable fashion educator, mix-media artist, zero waste designer and environmental activist.*

***Why did you start your company and what motivates you every day?***

I started my company because I no longer wanted to be part of the problem. I wanted to be a part of the solution. So, I needed to look in the mirror and be honest with myself about my misuse of fashion. Also, I had to shed light on the malpractices I experienced while working inside the industry. I made it my mission to highlight the negative impact fashion has on society and the environment. At the same time, I wanted to offer a solution for healthier fashion. In 2014, I started to become a positive fashion disruptor and started my journey by telling my personal fashion addiction story. I use education, film and mixed-media art as mediums to discuss the psychological and physical effects the fashion industry has on the environment and on humanity.

I am motivated everyday to help humanity understand the negative effects fashion has on the planet. Even more so now than ever, because we are at a critical juncture. According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), global temperatures could reach an irreversible tipping point in just 12 years if the world doesn't act dramatically to reduce the amount of carbon dioxide released into the atmosphere. I continue to be motivated by all of the changemakers in the world working together to make a difference.

## ***What are some of the major lessons you've learned along the way?***

I've learned many lessons over the years. But I still have so much to learn as I evolve and so does the fashion industry. Below are three key lessons I've learned that I carry with me and I infuse in my daily life:

1. I learned how to work with nature, not against it. The irony is that when we take care of our environment, the environment will take care of us. Here's how: Ask where your clothes are coming from so we can better educate ourselves and make informed decisions. Work with companies that are more transparent with their supply chain. The goal is to take care of our environment and use the least

amount and only what we need when it comes to energy, water, and our natural resources.

2. I learned how to intertwine eco-friendliness into my daily life. The more I begin to take care of myself, the more I began to take care of the environment and save money! My makeup, facial and body cleansers are more eco-friendly and natural now. I work in a zero-waste manner and cook all of my food at home to minimize use of plastic. I do not have a car, I do not eat red meat and I use eco-friendly laundry detergent!
3. Be brave and courageous and stand up for what you believe in. I learned that it is important to view our adversities in our life as a learning opportunity. I see my journey as a gift I can share with others so they can avoid the same mistakes. It's challenging to stand up as a woman against an archaic industry with unethical ways of doing business. I learned each time that I found the courage to tell my story. By enacting this bravery, I was able to help others. It is not just my story, but the story of millions of women.





## *Tell us about a setback you've faced and how did you overcome it?*

One major setback that I overcame was being \$100,000 in debt. Just eight years ago, I was unable to pay my rent and was days away from getting my car

repossessed. This was a major turning point in my life. I knew that I needed to change my self-destructive path to a healthier route. I decided to seek help and to face my issue of fashion addiction along with other issues.

My mentor and life coach inspired me to change, believed in me before I believed in myself, gave me the courage to be honest with myself. I am now debt free, healthier, and now turning my adversity into hope by sharing my story to empower those around me. Mental health is an important factor in the fashion industry that needs to be addressed NOW. I believe mass impulse consumerism leads to the amount of waste that is produced and sent to the landfills, which causes climate decimation and land degradation.

## ***What advice do you have for women who feel stuck in their careers?***

Here are a couple of pieces of advice that I give to women who feel stuck in their careers: nothing in this life is forever and change with the right intention is healthy. I advise them to step back and ask themselves why they feel stuck. We, as women, tend to stay complacent in our work and/or home environments because we do not feel we are capable of moving forward. We are often scared of the unknown, so we settle. Women are nurturers and want to make sure everyone and everything else is okay. We also crave the need to "feel wanted" which stems from our own self-doubt, thinking we aren't enough and letting our careers define us.

I have found that writing down the pros and cons of leaving a current career can be helpful. I often ask women what are the three things they want in their life, and if the path they are on is leading them there. The last thing I ask myself is whether or not I would regret not trying something new.

## *We all know how difficult work/life balance is. How do you draw the line to create separation in these two spheres?*

Time management is key and allows us to have a balance. Prioritizing a healthy relationship with yourself is critical because it is the most important relationship you will ever have and will lead you to self-love. Self-love is not found in the money we make or the clothes we buy.

Often times these impulse purchases are like a drug that gives us pseudo validation for a few moments. We buy items in the vain hope of filling an empty void in our lives that only self-respect can truly fill. I make it a goal to schedule a block of time in my calendar every week to **learn about myself**. I take myself out on dates and enjoy hiking, reading, and visiting art museums.

## *We love to support women-founded ventures. Is there a company/product that you've come across recently that you think more people should know about?*

While infusing myself more in the sustainability realm, one brand I am a fan of is **Plaine Products**. They are a refillable shampoo and conditioner duo working to save the environment. Not only is the company using a refillable can as their base to hold the product — the ingredients are all chemical free. Plaine Products strives to promote a safe option for the environment, educate on the importance of reuse, and advocate avoiding single-use plastic. Since I only wash my hair once a week, I have been able to purchase this product twice a year on a subscription base. I

recommend this product to everyone. You can learn more at [www.plaineproducts.com](http://www.plaineproducts.com).

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