

## Thought Leadership Piece

**Proposed Placement:** Fast Company

**Author:** Melinda Whittington, CEO of La-Z-Boy.

### The Pitch:

Dear Editor,

Gen Z is the first generation to grow up entirely on screens, and they are entering the workforce with the backs of 50-year-olds. Yet no one in the furniture industry is talking about it. That silence is the story.

Melinda Whittington, CEO of La-Z-Boy, argues that the sedentary crisis is the most overlooked "S" in ESG today—and that the \$1 billion gaming chair market is built on a public health lie. This is not a piece about furniture. It is a piece about corporate complicity, unregulated health claims, and the generation your readers are hiring, funding, and building companies with.

Fast Company's readers are builders, investors, and decision-makers who care deeply about the future of work and corporate accountability. This piece hands them a new lens: one that challenges them to ask whether the companies they back, the offices they design, and the chairs they sit in every day are quietly making their teams sicker. It is a conversation they did not know they needed—until now.

We are offering this as an exclusive op-ed. The full article is attached.

**Article:**

**The ergonomics scam: Why the furniture industry is complicit in a public health crisis**

By Melinda Whittington

Consider Faker, the most decorated professional gamer in history. He spends upwards of 14 hours a day in a chair. Every single day, for years. And what does the industry sell him? A throne of injection-molded plastic, cheap foam, and a racing stripe, designed not for his spine but for his Instagram feed. We would not accept this standard in any other industry that touches human health. Why do we accept it here?

The answer is uncomfortable: because the furniture industry has decided that aesthetics sell, and health does not.

This is not a niche problem. The American Chiropractic Association estimates that back pain is the single leading cause of disability worldwide. Research from the Journal of Occupational Health found that prolonged sitting in poorly designed seating is directly linked to musculoskeletal disorders in young adults—a population we once assumed was too young to worry about. Gen Z spends an average of nine hours a day in a seated position, between school, remote work, and screen time. We are not talking about a comfort preference, but a generation being structurally damaged in real time, and an industry that is profiting from it.

The gaming chair market alone is projected to exceed \$1 billion globally, much of it built on a simple lie: that a chair shaped like a Formula 1 seat is good for your body. Most fail basic ergonomic standards. The lumbar support is decorative. The foam degrades within 18 months. The young consumer who saved up to buy it will likely be visiting a physical therapist before the warranty expires.

The ESG conversation in our industry is broken, and I am tired of pretending otherwise. We congratulate ourselves for sourcing recycled materials. We publish carbon-neutral pledges. We photograph our supply chains and call it accountability. But not one major furniture manufacturer has stood up and asked the question that actually matters: Is this product making the people who use it healthier, or sicker?

A chair built from 100% sustainable materials that destroys a 22-year-old's lumbar spine is not a responsible product. It is greenwashing. True sustainability must include human sustainability—the physical longevity of the people our products are designed to serve. If we are serious about social responsibility, we cannot keep treating the "S" in ESG as an afterthought dressed up. The body of the person sitting in our chair is a social responsibility issue.

So what does real accountability look like? It starts with honesty. Stop marketing chairs as ergonomic when they are not. The word "ergonomic" has been technically unregulated, strategically deployed, and almost entirely meaningless. We need industry-wide standards that actually define what qualifies

as ergonomic support, enforced not by marketing departments but by independent health bodies.

It also means treating technology as a tool for health, not just aesthetics. Sensors that monitor posture.

Adaptive lumbar supports that respond to how a body actually moves throughout a 12-hour session.

Materials that do not collapse under sustained use. The question is whether the industry has the will to make them standard rather than a luxury upsell.

At La-Z-Boy, we are moving in this direction—not because it is a good story to tell, but because after nearly a century of studying how the human body rests, we know that the status quo is indefensible.

We are not asking for credit. We are asking our competitors to stop hiding behind recycled plastic and racing stripes and have an honest conversation about what we owe the people sitting in our chairs.

The furniture industry has had decades to get this right, but we chose aesthetics and margin. That is not a design failure, but a moral one.

*Melinda Whittington is the CEO of La-Z-Boy Incorporated.*

**Strategy Note:** This piece positions Melinda Whittington as a fearless industry critic willing to indict her own sector—a rare and credible stance that earns editorial trust in major publications. By framing ergonomics as an ESG issue rather than a product feature, the piece elevates La-Z-Boy's brand conversation from furniture retail to public health advocacy. The "human sustainability" framework directly supports La-Z-Boy's ongoing R&D pivot toward sensor-integrated, clinically informed design. Targeting Fast Company ensures reach among the innovation-minded business leaders and

tech-adjacent consumers most likely to drive industry accountability and become La-Z-Boy's next generation of customers.