Eons Ahead EP 18 Turning Trash into Treasure with Jussi Veikko Saloranta hosted by Alex Wolfe

TRANSCRIPT

Jay

It's usually the poorest areas in the world, but also the most polluted areas in the world, because if you on a daily basis need to fight to provide food and shelter for your family, then recycling is probably not very high on your priority. So when we go into these communities, like for example the area in Bangkok, we can see plastic waste everywhere.

Now because of this operation, we can actually put a monetary value on that plastic garbage. And what we do is at our centre we're buying the plastic garbage from these people. We have a price per kilo. You can bring in your garbage and we'll pay you cash on the spot, which basically means that now these people can first of all earn an extra income by cleaning their own community.

Interviewer
Welcome everyone to the Aeons Ahead podcast. I'm your host, Alex Wolfe, and on the show we like to have deep, intimate conversations with amazing people that are aeons ahead. But what does it mean to be aeons ahead? Well, it means they're ahead of their time. They see things other people don't see, and they're able to manifest these visions into the world, creating a positive impact for humanity. They're often doing things that other people are simply not doing, and I love that—they're trailblazers, pioneers, conscious thought leaders, risk-taking entrepreneurs. And our guest today is definitely one of those.

His name is Jussi Saloranta. Nailed it. He is a serial entrepreneur, an investor and philanthropist serving as chairman of Corsair Group International, a global conservatorium tackling environmental challenges like plastic waste, pollution, climate change and poverty. With a diverse background spanning real estate, hospitality, finance, energy, fintech and transportation,

Jussi has led cutting-edge projects in green energy, digital currencies and financial technologies since 2011. Originally from Turku, Finland and based in Thailand since 2005, he is also passionate about organic farming and sustainable energy innovation. He's involved in one of the most inspiring and impactful projects that I've ever seen on my journey here on this Earth. So I'm very excited to introduce him here today. He's aeons ahead—Jussi.

Jay
Thank you so much. What a wonderful welcome. Thank you very much. By the way, I love the introduction for the show. I think you're really nailing it. It's a great, great introduction. And thank you very much for having me.

Interviewer
I appreciate it. I'm so happy that you're here. I'm very excited about this conversation. Ever since I got shown this amazing project, this venture, this impactful mission, I was blown away. People send me things all the time. I'm constantly shown decks and business opportunities and business models, but there was something about this that I was like, wow, this is incredible—it truly blew me away. Beyond all that, it's the impact that this can create. I don't know if I've ever seen a project or venture that could actually create so much impact. I know it's

a big task what you're doing, but for the people that don't know, let's simplify it and then we'll dive in deeper from there.

Jay
Perfect. Very nice. Thank you very much—that's a great compliment, I really appreciate the kind words. Maybe a little bit about our operations. To summarise in a nutshell: we focus on taking other people's garbage—in this case plastic waste, which our planet is drowning in—and converting that plastic into something with value that can be used again in an industrial fashion to create new plastic products. In other words, we take traditionally unrecyclable materials and recycle them into something good. While doing that, we clean the environment and help people in need—especially those in extreme poverty—receive income opportunities while they help clean their own communities. Everything else is built around that.

Interviewer

Utilising this, people get an opportunity to generate some extra income, which is wonderful, and they're doing a great job cleaning up the plastic that's destroying our planet. It's become a crisis in itself. Then you're able to turn the plastic into a renewable source—is that the way to put it?

Jay
That's correct. We're taking plastic garbage—bags, wrapping materials, everything people typically throw away—and converting it back into its original liquid form. It may surprise many, but all these plastics we use daily, like this plastic bottle, are originally made from crude oil. By using a process called pyrolysis, we convert plastic from its existing form back into liquid—pyrolysis oil—a form similar to crude oil, which petrochemical companies can then use to create new plastic products.

Basically, we can take an old plastic bag, convert it into oil, and that oil can be used to make a new plastic bag. That results in more environmentally friendly circular plastics. I live in Thailand—about 20 years now.

Southeast Asia is one of the most polluted regions for plastic waste. We've all seen beaches covered with plastic—the ocean throws it back to us. Until today, the industry largely accepted that plastics aren't recyclable, so most plastics produced each year end up in landfills, are burned, or leak into the oceans.

Our mission is to take the garbage nobody wants and convert it into a high-quality, valuable product that we supply to some of the largest petrochemical companies in the world, like Shell.

Interviewer
When I saw Shell was involved I thought: the big players see the impact and value here. That's a big deal.

Jay
Absolutely. There's a big push toward using this garbage efficiently and sustainably. Looking at the current situation: annual production of new plastics globally is approximately 500 million tonnes a year—significantly more than the combined weight of every human being on the planet. In one year alone we produce more new plastics than the combined weight of humanity.

About 95% of that plastic isn't recycled in any way. It goes to landfills, oceans, or is burned—that's a problem. What's even more concerning: projections show this annual production is expected to triple in the next 30 years. If we don't do something quickly, we will literally drown in plastic.

Right now, production of new plastic is increasing about ten times faster than development of the global plastic recycling infrastructure. We urgently need to invest in building proper infrastructure for recycling plastic garbage, exactly as has been done for metal, glass and paper. That's what we focus on.

Interviewer
Incredible and so needed. What inspired you to get into this? I understand the problem needs a solution—was that the core reason? What was it for you?

Jay
My introduction to pyrolysis—the concept, technology and process—came through Chulalongkorn University in Thailand. They'd done years of research. The real trigger for global change, though, was in 2017 when the Chinese government implemented a ban on plastic waste imports. For 30–40 years, most plastic garbage from the US, Europe, Australia, Japan and other developed countries was sent to China.

Plastic was packed into shipping containers, sent over, Chinese companies got paid to bring it in, and a lot of that plastic was dumped into land, burned in open air, or even poured into the ocean. In 2017, China said "enough—we won't be the world's garbage dump." That was a wake-up call for the West.

Europe and others had no infrastructure for proper plastic recycling because it was so convenient to ship it away—out of sight, out of mind. Suddenly we couldn't send it anymore; containers started stacking up all over Europe and the US. Then the EU and UN started creating regulations where plastics need to be recycled regionally—bans on shipping out of Europe and such.

Since 2018 there's been a shift: plastics must be properly managed and recycled; they can't just be sent away to be dumped. When I saw pyrolysis in a piloting stage at the university, my thought was: if this is possible—and many said it wasn't, that you can't make oil from plastic—if we can take garbage nobody wants and turn it into oil to make fuels or, better, into circular plastics, then maybe there's a market.

Our goal became to industrialise this and build a concept we can expand globally. Plastic waste is a global problem—I haven't found a country without it. We also wanted it to support local communities, especially in areas of extreme poverty.

We're extremely passionate about this. Too many good projects depend on donations and grants; when donations stop, the project stops. If we want long-term, sustainable change, it has to be built as a business—financially self-sustaining, independent of welfare or grants—so it can become a long-term solution.

Interviewer
I love that—sustainable impact. The infrastructure you've created is powerful. Everyone I've met from your organisation is so passionate; you can feel it. I feel it too when you talk—I know you're onto something big. There's a big problem and a big opportunity: clear out the plastic, help people along the way, turn it into a renewable source for plastics again, keep recycling,

eliminate waste. If we had to put measurable numbers on this—how much are we reducing using this process, roughly?

Jay
Starting from our process efficiency: it's extremely efficient and environmentally friendly. In our facilities, from 1,000 kilos of plastic, we can generate as much as 900 litres of pyrolysis oil. We then supply that oil to clients who use it to make new plastics. Regulations from the EU and others now require companies producing the plastic products we use daily—if they do business in Europe—to use recycled raw materials as part of manufacturing.

Multiple puzzle pieces need to come together: requirements for producers to use recycled raw material, which creates large-scale demand for the pyrolysis oil we produce. As a result, for the first time, plastic garbage actually has value. When plastic has value and more people understand that, we can do projects like in Bangkok with the Bangkok Community Health Foundation—our first plastic waste collection centre in the largest slum, Khlong Toei, where about 140,000 people live in extreme poverty with little support.

It's usually the poorest areas that are the most polluted; if you're fighting daily for food and shelter, recycling isn't a priority. In these communities, plastic waste is everywhere—between houses, all over. People just throw it away. With our operation, we put a monetary value on plastic garbage by buying it: price per kilo, bring your garbage, we weigh it, and pay cash on the spot.

People can earn extra income by cleaning their communities. A funny story: on day one, we put up a big sign with the price per kilo and invited people. Some came in hesitantly with small bags—"Are you really going to buy my garbage?"—absolutely. A few minutes later they were back with wheelbarrows full. When the material everyone considered garbage suddenly has value, behaviour changes.

Interviewer
Such a win-win.

Jay
Exactly. Plastic manufacturers are turning to recycled materials—voluntarily and because of new regulations—which creates value along the entire chain down to people in difficult conditions who can now earn by cleaning their own communities.

Interviewer
Incredible—literally turning garbage into value. It's like alchemy at scale—lead into gold—cleaning things up in the process. I think you mentioned plastic credits—can you talk more? How do plastic credits compare to carbon credits?

Jay
Plastic credit as a concept first appeared publicly around 2020 and picked up momentum. Carbon credits are more complex—you're dealing with emissions in the air. Plastic is straightforward—it's tangible.

With carbon, you have allowances and trading; plastic is simpler: if your company uses plastic in packaging and you end up polluting, say 1,000,000 kilos a year, the world is moving toward obligating your company to recover from the environment the same amount of plastic waste. Companies that create pollution must work with those who clean the environment, and plastic credits are the vehicle in between. For example, a large beverage company generating tons of

plastic waste can call Corsair and ask how we can work together, but globally that's complicated. So plastic credits—in our case, a digital receipt—prove that plastic waste has been recovered. In 2021 we created the CSR Plastic Credit—a digital receipt. "CSR" comes from Corporate Sustainability and Responsibility (and, if you drop a few letters, it also nods to Corsair).

Companies can now contribute to the cleaning process by acquiring these digital receipts. So far this has been mostly voluntary, but we're seeing global regulations—from the EU and the UN. Recently, about 170 countries signed a legally binding agreement to implement national and global regulations on plastic pollution.

The direction: if your business creates plastic pollution, you're obligated to work with someone to clean the same amount from the environment. When we collect plastic from landfills, oceans and beaches, every kilo turned from waste into usable raw material is documented and audited by an independent third party. Based on that work, Corsair can issue plastic credits. Companies can acquire those credits and, using our retirement programme, publicly claim their contribution—the credits are retired (sent to a specific wallet and locked forever), proving the plastic removal.

Interviewer
Which countries have the biggest plastic waste issues, and why?

Jay
A good example of regulation is the Philippines, one of the countries with the biggest plastic waste problems; Indonesia and the Philippines are among the worst. First, there's very little existing waste-management infrastructure. In Thailand, for example, there are more than 2,000 landfills; the country generates about 3 billion kilos of plastic waste a year, and most gets dumped into landfills, which eventually fill up.

The government then has to find new landfill locations and keep expanding. There hasn't been proper infrastructure in much of Southeast Asia. Meanwhile, as the middle class grows, plastic consumption grows. Someone who used to buy fruits and vegetables in a market with a basket now goes to a convenience store where everything is packaged in plastic. More middle class means more plastic—and with poor waste management, it all gets dumped. During floods, plastic floats into rivers and ends up in the ocean.

Interviewer
Given the scale of the mess, why wouldn't a country want to get involved?

Jay
Right now, the trend is that everybody wants this to happen. The big question was "How?" Our process and technology (and there are other companies doing this too) is seen by most as the most effective solution. We can stop the flow of plastics into landfills and oceans and instead use them efficiently to make oil that can be used to make new plastics.

Not only can we stop the flow of new plastics into the environment, we can also mine old landfills and recover decades-old plastic. Using plastic already here as waste reduces the need for new oil to be pumped and refined to make plastic products. There are massive carbon-emissions savings as a result, and we turn unwanted garbage into something of great value.

Interviewer
It's really like alchemy—lead into gold. What does "golden age" bring up for you in this mission?

Jay
A global mindset change: seeing garbage as valuable. We joke that when we see garbage trucks in Bangkok, they're like cash delivery trucks. Mountains of garbage for some are mountains of gold for us because we can convert them into something useful—and do it in an environmentally friendly way.

Interviewer
You can even apply that mindset personally—turning negatives into positives. Any example from your life where a negative became a positive?

Jay
So many times. You put it beautifully—that's exactly how I look at life. We've found ourselves in difficult situations, and once you engage with the issues, new opportunities open as a result. Looking back, those crises guided us where we were supposed to go.

Good things come in waves—and so do challenges. I'm 42, been in Thailand since my early twenties. Moving away from Finland at 20 with a one-way ticket—no support network—forces you to survive and grow. You have good days and "character-building" days. Be true to your mission, believe in yourself, and build a strong team.

There's a saying: when a business succeeds, it's due to the team; when it fails, it's due to the leader. I believe in hard work—try to be the hardest-working person in the room. You don't need a world-changing idea; any reasonably good idea, with focus, dedication and commitment—especially when times are hard—can succeed.

I've seen people who weren't the smartest or most educated make their business extremely successful through dedication and hard work. You must love what you're doing; if you'd do it even without money, you're probably on the right track.

Interviewer
Well said. Persistence and passion have driven all my success too. Surround yourself with smart people, keep showing up, never give up. With that persistence and passion—what's the vision for the next five to ten years?

Jay
I believe we'll solve the global plastic waste problem in the next 30 years. Plastics will become recyclable like paper, glass and metal. During that transformation—from discarded waste to valuable raw material—a multi-multi-billion-dollar industry will be created. New companies and many successful individuals will emerge.

Plastic waste will become a traded commodity like metals and gold. As this advances, we'll look at garbage differently; it will have monetary value. People won't throw plastic away—or even if they do, someone will pick it up because it's money. That's how you stop plastic flowing into the environment.

For example, in Thailand we work with more than 100,000 fishermen. As part of their daily work, plastic gets stuck in their nets. They used to pull it out and throw it back into the water because they had no option. We pay them to bring the plastic ashore. Now they're paid to

catch fish and plastic. We get raw material—nicely washed by nature—and there's less plastic in the oceans. I see this happening; it'll take time—maybe about 30 years—but it will be sorted.

As a company, Corsair aims to be at the forefront, building advanced recycling centres all over the world—almost like coffee shops, a branch in every city—to remove local plastic from landfills and the environment and turn it into valuable product for better, more environmentally friendly circular plastics. From a business point of view, I truly feel I'm in the right place.

My past career in real estate, construction and other ventures—some successful, some not—prepared me for this. I love my job; it stopped being about money a long time ago. I'm passionate about being both environmentalist and capitalist. I love building businesses and making deals. It's unique to be both at once: I've had days meeting environmental activists in the morning and oil-company executives in the evening—and both say we're doing a fantastic job. We want to be in the forefront, push this change faster, and involve poor communities so profits also provide change for lives of people in extreme poverty.

Interviewer
Beautiful vision and mission—thank you. I remember in your bio you're interested in organic farming. How does that correlate with what you're doing?

Jay
That's a passion project; we're not in that business, but I was introduced to aquaponics and hydroponics a few years ago. I have three children. When my first daughter was growing up, I started to look at food differently. You want the cleanest food to fuel a child's growth, and that triggered my interest in organic farming.

I plan to one day take time off and start my own organic farm in Thailand—I see myself as a peaceful organic farmer in the future. A friend recently established a goat farm in Thailand; we've been studying organic goat milk benefits. I'm very much into clean, organic food.

Interviewer
I'll hold that vision for you—the farm, goats, and I'll hook you up with our plant-signalling technology called Agrius; it sends electromagnetic signals to crops to increase yields and reduce fertiliser by triggering natural responses. I love things that tap into nature's intelligence. Side question: you're a seasoned entrepreneur who's met many impactful people—who are three of the most impactful for you?

Jay
There's an old saying: the teacher arrives when the student is ready. Around 20, I met Yari in Finland—my first true mentor. He'd had a couple of bankruptcies and at least one divorce, but also a successful business—just the right combination of failure and success. He took me under his wing and explained how business works.

Later, as I grew, I met Sanjeev, a successful IT entrepreneur—my second mentor and great supporter. Interestingly, the greatest mentor turned out to be my father. He's always been there—very successful in business—but for the first 15 years of my journey I wasn't ready for those conversations. In the last 5–10 years he's become the most meaningful mentor.

I had to go through challenges, obstacles and gain the flying hours to resonate on the same level. His guidance has been the most important. I've been fortunate to meet amazing people at the right time—each helped me elevate to the next level in business and personal development.

Interviewer
Totally agree—the right mentor at the right time is priceless. For people who want to get involved but don't live in Thailand or the Philippines—say they're in North America—what can they do besides recycling at home?

Jay
Everything we're building is about community. While I'm often the face of our group, it's truly teamwork. We've been fortunate to bring in passionate, smart, hardworking people into our global network. We're building plants in North America—Canada and the US.

We can expect the first Corsair plastic-waste recycling centres to be developed and launched in the US and Canada within this year—starting smaller and scaling up over the next 18–24 months. To build these plants and deliver solutions globally, a lot is fuelled through our direct-sales/network-marketing company implemented in 2021.

We've built a global network of environmentally conscious entrepreneurs helping develop these centres and the recycling infrastructure. Anyone interested should look up the Amplivo network—we're expanding in the US and Canada. It's an amazing group passionate about making change happen.

As I said, just as there are opportunities for very low-income communities, there's also a strong business we're building that generates opportunities for people who want to combine environmental passion with business interests and build a career or other opportunities from it. We're looking to expand globally—and that's only possible with like-minded people in different regions and countries.

Interviewer
Absolutely—nothing significant is done alone. If that resonates with you—help clean up this plastic crisis and make extra income—become the "environmental capitalist." I love that term. Mind–heart coherence—doing and being. On that note, what's something on your heart you'd like to leave the audience with?

Jay
Change is possible. We deeply believe in our mission. This combination of environmentalism and capitalism—two worlds that don't usually meet—is possible. If anyone out there is interested in working with us—expanding our operations and acting as a brand ambassador—we're looking for like-minded people to join the mission and clean up the planet's plastic pollution. Ultimately, we need to leave a healthier, cleaner, greener planet for future generations. And while doing that, we can create valuable business and income opportunities. That's what it's about.

Interviewer
Beautiful—one of the best quotes my mentor gave me: always leave a place better than you found it. That's what you're doing. Thank you for what you're doing. I wish you 100 years of success, and I'll hold that vision of you on that organic farm with the kids, goats' milk and Agrius. We'll leave links for everything—your company, how to get in touch, and the community. Thank you again—it's been a pleasure and an honour.

Jay
Thank you so much. Thank you for having me.