



**“A global trade leader is a pathfinder — it’s blazing the trail for others to follow in an area that is not well enough understood or appreciated.”**

**Zoe Dodge**

Vice President of Production and Country Manager for Vietnam, Allbirds, Inc.

Trade career highlights	
<b>32 years in the industry</b>	Footwear development & global sourcing
<b>Executive positions</b>	Asia Production Head, Country Manager – Vietnam, Allbirds, Inc.
	Country Director, VF Corporation
	Senior Director Development, Manufacturing Innovation and Footwear & Apparel, adidas
<b>27 years in product development &amp; manufacturing</b>	Head of Design, Lyle & Scott
	Head of Product Development, Hunter Boot
<b>Academics</b>	MBA in Artificial Intelligence

In every corner of the world, there are things that need to be improved. For things to be better, change must start somehow. By choosing a career in manufacturing, Zoe Dodge feels privileged to be part of pioneering change, and by doing so, making people’s lives better.

From a young age, Zoe saw how manufacturing could help people out of poverty. She was born in the United Kingdom but grew up in South Africa where her father worked in footwear sourcing throughout the 1970s. Inspired by his work, she decided to follow in his footsteps. A third-generation shoemaker starting with her grandfather, she believes she was “destined for the industry.”

Her early years in South Africa exposed her to cultures other than her own. While differences in people did not matter to her as a child, apartheid came as a shock. As she got older, she understood how poorly others were treated compared to her.

This inspired her to work abroad to understand and explore new cultures and to work with communities that could benefit from manufacturing. She also wanted to make sure that manufacturing was done in the right way.

At 21 years old in the early 1990s, she went to work in China. As a Footwear Development Manager for Nike and Reebok, she helped them create a code of conduct, as well as worker development programs and safe working environments. She focused on ensuring there was no child labor in their factories and employees were paid a living wage, along with other corporate social responsibility (CSR) efforts.

**Pursuing a career in sourcing & product development**

“I spent nearly 10 years in China. I came back to the UK and worked with many small brands helping them to grow through leveraging opportunities to source and buy products from various East Asian countries,” Zoe recalled.

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In 2012, Zoe became Head of Quality and Sourcing at the Dune Group, a London-based footwear designer and manufacturer which ships to more than 130 countries. In her role, she led the strategic expansion of the brand and implementation of other key initiatives, including the creation of bonded warehouses within its Asian territories. She also implemented warehouse systems enhancements such as factory grading, inspection rates and continental shift patterns with unionized workforces.

In 2013, Zoe became Head of Product at Hunter Boot, known for its rubber Wellington boots, where she helped grow the business by expanding its offerings, sourcing and distribution networks. She also provided new material development innovation and instigated a sourcing matrix of ethically sound manufacturing sources.

She then joined Lyle and Scott, a Scottish fashion brand of high-quality knitwear and other clothing, as Head of Design in 2014. Leading the footwear and accessories and licensed apparel division, Zoe oversaw all aspects of design, development and sourcing. In this role, she managed the shift from 100% buying function to 100% design-led manufacturing for footwear and accessories.

These experiences led her to work with Adidas in Herzogenaurach, Germany, first as a Director of Development for footwear, then as Senior Director of Development for footwear and apparel in 2016. Her responsibilities included leading sports style collaborations and reducing business complexity by creating value streams. She led the E2E business for footwear and apparel valued at \$531 million and facilitated collaboration of Adidas, Pharrell, Chanel and Collette to launch the first commercial shoe to market in five weeks.

In 2018, Zoe did not hesitate to accept when Adidas offered her to move to Vietnam and take on the role of Senior Director of Development for Manufacturing Innovation. She led the global innovation in the company's largest manufacturing region and enabled cost mitigation and lead time reduction to create an agile environment for customers. To remain ahead of the competition, she enabled digital processes, artificial intelligence, Internet of Things, and augmented reality, while improving automation and lean processes for localized production.

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A year after moving to Vietnam, Zoe joined VF Sourcing Asia as Country Head and legal representative from 2019. The company handles sourcing activities in Asia for VF Corporation, one of the world's largest suppliers of outdoor and activity-based lifestyle brands, including The North Face, Vans, Dickies and Timberland. She managed 120 people in the footwear, apparel and equipment department, and was directly accountable for sourcing through 150 CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) approved factories with a combined FOB (Free On Board) value of \$1.2 billion.

### **Blazing a new trail as a global trade leader**

In October 2020, she became Head of Production in Asia and the first employee in Vietnam for Allbirds, a startup that designs and sells shoes using sustainable materials. She oversees the company's Asia production and manages sustainable production across China, South Korea, and Vietnam for footwear and apparel, ensuring lowest possible environment impact, use of natural materials and focus on regenerative sustainability.

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Zoe has pursued her advocacy for empowering women throughout all of her roles in trade, in which she became a successful trade leader herself. She noted that because women are more empathetic and nurturing in nature, they become much better leaders, learners and negotiators.

Passing on her lessons and principles to the next generation of trade leaders, she emphasizes the benefits of having mentors and sponsors – not for financial purposes – but for guidance and opening pathways through their connections.

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“I’m making sure our materials are good for the world rather than polluting it. I think this is how our new world would go forward. We didn’t need as many retailers as we had. We just needed people that wanted to trade sustainably,” Zoe says. “Instead of producing thousands of things that people do not need, we should be thoughtful and mindful of the products that we produce and how we produce them,” she added.

Through Allbirds, Zoe worked with the Hinrich Foundation by supporting students in the Master of Global Trade at RMIT University in Vietnam. She said the program and the Hinrich Foundation scholarship offered a level playing field, as it was not specific to gender, race or age. As a proponent of gender equality, she believed the program also provided an opportunity for women to excel in the industry.

Zoe has pursued her advocacy for empowering women throughout all of her roles in trade, in which she became a successful trade leader herself. She noted that because women are more empathetic and nurturing in nature, they become much better leaders, learners and negotiators. “Though the situation is getting better, there are still huge barriers to women in this industry,” she says. “A lot of people are recruiting females to more senior positions, but then not creating the environments in which females thrive.”

Zoe emphasized the importance of keeping the lines of communication open, especially in a trade environment, to earn trust a lot more quickly. “We need to be very understanding and appreciative of those relationships we’re building, and ensure that’s an equal balance for everyone,” she says.

### Working towards a better future

Zoe plans to dedicate the next 10 years of her career pursuing more sustainable ways to protect the environment. She has been working with the government, factories and third parties in Vietnam to enable solar rooftops and introduce green energy to the industry. After completing her MBA in Artificial Intelligence from the University of Cumbria, she aspires to move to a Chief Technology Officer role where she can enable manufacturing 4.0 to improve efficiency and productivity.

While Zoe often mentors young managers as a member of an ancient livery (through which she was granted the Freedom of the City of London), she offers mentorship to help people reach their full potential.

Passing on her lessons and principles to the next generation of trade leaders, she emphasizes the benefits of having mentors and sponsors – not for financial purposes – but for guidance and opening pathways through their connections. Her father, now 77, has been a source of wisdom and support throughout her career. He still reaches out to her with industry insights and tips.

For those who doubted their choice of career, she advises to “never give up.” Zoe admitted that at one point in her career, her passion shifted from manufacturing to floristry, so she left the footwear industry to become a florist. During her floristry stint, she learned how to run a business, market products, and enhanced her creativity. Eventually, the footwear industry pulled her back

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“I was very lucky to make shoes for some of the most notable celebrities and sports people in the world,” she says. “Now, it’s my time to give back not only my skill set, but actually my philosophy that we have to do things better.”

## About the Hinrich Foundation

The [Hinrich Foundation](#) is a unique Asia-based philanthropic organization that works to advance mutually beneficial and sustainable global trade. Sustainable global trade strengthens relationships between nations and improves people's lives. We believe the most effective way to advance sustainable global trade is to invest in informing and training the people engaged in trade.

It supports research and education programs that build understanding and leadership in global trade. Its goal is to build a network of next-generation trade leaders by partnering with universities and corporations across global value chains.

Its team of global trade experts and practitioners apply their deep knowledge and experience in trade, economics, policymaking and education to deliver the Foundation's programs. Key initiatives include:

### [International Trade Rankings](#)

Created in partnership with educational rankings expert QS, the International Trade Rankings provide a data-driven list of the world's top international trade-related graduate programs

### [Hinrich Trade Educators Center](#)

The Trade Educators Center provides educators and students access to a collection of free classroom discussion guides, reading lists, whitepapers and videos focused on real-world business and policy scenarios

### [Global Business Scholarships](#)

Annual scholarships awarded to people with a passion for pursuing or advancing their careers in global trade through master's study at Georgetown University, London School of Economics, Nanyang Technological University, INSEAD and the University of Auckland.

For more information, visit [hinrichfoundation.com](http://hinrichfoundation.com)

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