We were fourth years at UC Berkeley. Both of us had offers in corporate America. Investment banking and consulting seemed to be the futures waiting for us after graduation. All that changed one day after listening to a lecture in one of our business ethics courses where we first heard about the idea that gourmet mushrooms can be grown entirely on recycled coffee grounds.

We could really do something with this idea: we discussed the possibilities. America is absolutely addicted to coffee. The world production of coffee is nearly 7 million tons a year. Only 1% ends up in the cup, while 99% ends up in the land fill. The possibility of diverting this waste stream, a negative externality, into something of value, gourmet mushrooms, was something we just couldn't let go. As the weeks went by, we really dove into first seeing if we could actually grow mushrooms from coffee grounds, and then seeing if this idea could work as the basis of a full scale social venture.

The first plan of action was definitely an interesting experience. We went around to local coffee shops collecting used coffee grounds. Out of the 10 buckets of the mushrooms we planted, only one grew. In that one bucket, we saw potential. We took that batch to the local Berkeley Whole Foods, and the team members we showed it to took a real interest. We created a plan and submitted our business proposal to "Bears Breaking Boundaries," an entrepreneurial competition sponsored by the UC Berkeley Chancellor to provide $5,000 in initial funding for a ground breaking project. And that's really the story of how we got started, giving up the corporate titles to carry a new one: "the mushroom guys."

At its heart, BTTR Ventures (pronounced Better) stands for "back to the roots," a phrase that encompasses the idea of creating a company that stands for sustainability, innovation, and social responsibility. What is so unique about Back to the Roots is its completely closed loop system. We first utilized a large waste stream to produce something of value: gourmet oyster mushrooms. The mushrooms were harvested and sold across NorCal. The coffee grounds, enriched by the mushroom growth, turned into premium soil amendment that was then donated to local nurseries and urban farms, giving back to the community from which we gather the coffee grounds from.

Since we launched in 2009, we have diverted and transformed over 50,000 pounds of coffee grounds into a rich soil for local, healthy food and have grown 7,500 pounds of delicious gourmet mushrooms sold at all Nor Cal Whole Foods Markets. Starting off as purely an urban mushroom farm, Back to the Roots has transformed into an eco-centered company dedicated to bringing fresh, sustainably grown food straight to the home through our grow-at-home mushroom kits: the Easy-to-Grow Mushroom Garden . Our vision is to serve as a standard bearer for innovation and responsibility in our community in order to inspire others to work towards a more sustainable future. We're happy to be pursuing this vision first through our mushroom gardens!

Our Easy-to-Grow Mushroom Gardens, sold on our website, are packaged in post-consumer cardboard and printed on with soy ink, an environmentally better alternative. Our mushroom kits arrive in the mail ready to grow: we wanted to create a sustainable product that is easy and simple, so everyone can enjoy not only growing fresh, but also eating fresh. We really love the fact that when kids get involved with growing with our Mushroom Garden, they not only get exposed to sustainability but also get to experience growing their own foods. The Back to the Roots Mushroom Gardens yield up to one pound of delicious oyster mushroom in as little as 10 days, and can harvest as many as four crops. And while people worry about the taste of the mushrooms tasting like the coffee they grow from, plenty of chefs such as Alice Waters of Chez Panisse, can attest to their authentic nutty flavor.

Through our Easy-to-Grow Mushroom Garden , we hope to encourage people to go "Back to the Roots" of sustainability!