

Triple Bottom Line Strategies for Building a Green Business

In a world where global warming, the energy crisis, environmental devastation and a myriad of social problems are posing huge threats to people's health and security, the repercussions for business are huge. Pressure from consumers, scientists and not-for-profit organizations has created a perfect storm of risks for businesses that don't act. [Do you know the risks that your industry is facing?](#)

Sustainability, Green Business, Conscious Business, Social Responsible Business and Values-driven business are the new popular catchphrases and companies are adopting these in their marketing. Many are actually shifting their business model to reflect these principles and are seeing the benefits.

What is Sustainability, Green or Conscious Business?

Some define sustainability and green business narrowly to refer only to environmental protection of the earth's climate, water, forest etc. Others expand sustainability and being Green into environmental sustainability, economic sustainability (operating a business in a manner to allow you to stay in business over time) and social sustainability (investing in people and communities). Sustainability has been defined as 'meeting the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs'. Or simply put, 'Enough-For All – Forever'.

Conscious business includes these ideas and takes this a step further. As defined by Fred Kofman, cofounder of Axialent, an international consulting firm, "a conscious business fosters personal fulfillment in the individuals, mutual respect in the community, and success in the organization. It means finding your passion and expressing your essential values through your work. A conscious business seeks to promote the intelligent pursuit of happiness in all its stakeholders".

Forward thinking entrepreneurs are implementing innovative green and conscious business approaches that are directly translating into profits. An integrated understanding and approach is needed in order to guide businesses to ride the green wave, where more and more consumers are wanted value with values.

Here are some strategies to consider for your business.

People: It's all about relationships.

This is about social sustainability. Investing in people and the communities is not only a good thing to do but has huge business advantages.

Employees

Skilled employees are becoming business' most valuable resource. To attract, minimize turnover and to energize employees means not conducting 'business as usual'.

- **Motivate Employees:** Engage your employees in Big Sustainability Goals that serve people and the planet. Set up sessions to find out about their concerns around environmental and social issues. Discover where they see the values-actions gaps within your organization. Your employees are at the front lines and when engaged in the bigger picture, they will come up with creative solutions. Not only that, it will energize them. When these goals are effectively integrated with your core product or service, the result is enhanced value.

Ask yourself: What are your employees' essential values? Is there a disconnect between their values and some of your business practices? What is the experience of your employees? What is the behaviour that is

generated from that? How is that expressed in your success in the marketplace?

- **Valuing your employees:** There are different ways to break the daily routines of most workplaces. Adopt some non-traditional approaches to things like traditional meetings. Hold a breakfast meeting at a local diner. For longer in-office meetings cater them with organic or locally sourced foods based on different themes. Stock the office kitchen with fair trade teas, organic coffees and maybe splurge on a cappuccino maker. It's often the small things that your staff takes notice of.
- **Support personal development:** Encourage your employee to continue learning through tuition reimbursements or additional career training. Offer them time off for school or volunteerism.
- **Create incentives for exceptional performance:** Employees are motivated by a mix of rewards from financial security to peer recognition. Making a difference to the things they care about can ignite your employees' passions and energize them in the workplace. Think of ways of rewarding them for their contributions to people and the planet. This could be a peer recognition award such as a plaque or a cake given out each month. You might reward them for their contributions to lowering the company's or their own carbon footprint or for their social contribution through some charitable work. This incentive should be aligned with the company's wider objectives.
- **Arrange company outings:** Offering your staff the opportunity to meet in different, non-conventional settings can only lead to better working relationships. It's an out of the box phenomena. When you break routine then your employees tend to think differently and this leads

to new ideas about operations and services for the enterprise. Some ideas are company picnics, hikes or even a local afternoon cruise.

Customers

Your customers are the life-blood of your business. Customers are thinking different these days and a growing number of them want value with values. They are concerned about the environmental and social performance of the businesses they support. There are numerous ways to authentically nurture customer loyalty.

- **Build Customer Trust through Third party certification.** Help your customers to make informed choices. Customers are wary of over-exaggerated and unverifiable claims from many businesses. 3rd party certification agencies do independent product testing to guarantee product claims. These range from areas of health and safety, environmental stewardship, to energy efficiency of products. As well these organizations scrutinize labor practices of participating organizations. 3rd party certification agencies include: FSC-Forest Stewardship council, LFP-Local Foods Plus, Fair Trade Certified, COG, USDA Organics, ULC. Build trust and loyalty by helping your customers make conscious choices by including certified products into your mix.
- **Be Transparent and Authentic.** Customers want to hear your authentic story. Tell them the values and principles that guide your business. Tell them the story of how you want to make a contribution to the community, the planet, through your business. This is what we mean by being authentic and customers are hungry for this. You can even tell them what you are struggling with. Very few people expect a business to be perfect. They want to know that you are on the right path and that you are doing your best. So, rather than hide the fact that your aren't as energy efficient as you could be or that your restaurant doesn't only use

local or organic food, tell them why. Let them know the process Give them an ideas of the economic variable and that you are trying to keep the prices at a manageable level for them and that's why you have made some of these decisions. That's what wins customers for the long term.

- **Get Customer Feedback.** You really want to know what your customers are thinking. What are they saying about your business to each other. Offer your customers incentives to give you feedback. It might be in the form of a contest or a toll free line just for customer service and feedback. Make sure you know that you value their thoughts and make a point of getting back to them to let them know how you are addressing these concerns. Word of mouth is powerful. Pick up the phone and call a customer who has offered feedback. This unusual act can have a magnified positive effect.

Community Relationships

Values-based businesses actively participate as members of the communities where they & their suppliers operate. Contributing to the community in which you or your suppliers work can have far-reaching business effects, from positive brand recognition, to free networking and marketing.

Extended stakeholder responsibility means being a global citizen through deepening awareness of your impacts on people & communities and working with these communities to understand the issues and find mutually acceptable solutions. Being community minded makes for a better and more rewarding work environment. Here are some ideas of what you can do:

Donate what you can: Many non-profits may need your time as much as your money. Help in the different ways that you are able. Forming partnerships with a non-profit that is dear to your employees can have far reaching impacts. Some companies are donating a percentage of their earnings by signing up with

organizations like [1% for the Planet](#) , with proceeds supporting various environmental organizations.

Mentor or Offer internships: My sons school has a fabulous program where the grade 7's and 8's, intern at various businesses or non-profits. Work with your local schools to support these kinds of programs. Your business may be able to provide training to less fortunate people and make a huge difference to their lives.

Create your own community program: It might be reaching out within your local community or a global community. Once you identify a need that moves your leaders and staff, start up a conversation with some members of that community and find out what would really help. Then use creative brainstorming among your group to develop an innovative program. Not only will you be helping the community but this can be a powerful teambuilding and motivational experience.

Planet- It's Easy to Reduce Your Footprint:

This is about environmental sustainability. You may already be actively pursuing some of these initiatives:

- **Reduce what you use:** Remember these all save you money. Don't print emails unless absolutely necessary. Do as much work digitally or electronically as possible and back it up. When you need to hard copy, print on both sides. Turn off equipment when not in use as well as the power bar to avoid phantom power usage. Reduce energy use by switching light bulbs with energy saving bulbs. If you put your employees to the task of figuring out ways of reducing, I'm sure they will come up with many creative solutions.

- **Recycle what you use:** Participate in your local municipality recycling program by recycling paper, glass, plastic or aluminum. If your building doesn't participate then call your landlord or speak to other tenants to initiate this. Recycle electronic and office products, return printer and ink cartridges to the manufacturer. There are many charitable or not-for-profit organizations that will gladly take equipment that you are no longer using.
- **Use green products:** These days there are many choices for quality low impact and responsibly produced products. You may have to do a bit of research or get help in sourcing these. Switching to biodegradable green cleaning products is not only good for the environment but for the health of your employees. Print on recycled paper using vegetable based inks. You can source printing companies that use waterless printing processes. Think about the lifecycle of new products that you are purchasing. Some companies have innovative programs and product design and they will take back equipment at the end of their life and reuse components and recycle the rest.
- **Use renewable energy:**
- **Install a water purifier:** We all know about the many negative health and environmental impacts of bottled water. Recently health concerns have grown around leaching of the chemical Bisphenol A from hard plastic containers into food and water. Encourage your employees to drink safe municipal tap water or go a step further and install a water purifier. Provide washable drinking cup.
- **Encourage Low impact commuting alternatives to travel:** There are many ways that employees can save energy when traveling to work such as cycling or carpooling. When you operate in a culture that

actively cares about the environment than you can support this. Toronto like other North American cities has a Bike to Work week that you can actively participate in. Flexible work hours, teleconferencing and occasional work at home can support this.

- **Create new products and re-invent existing ones:** If you are a manufacturer, wholesaler or retailer, your products may have greatest environmental and social impacts. Wholesalers and retailers can work with manufacturers to produce products that have lower environmental impacts. Lower energy and water usage and improve performance in the manufacturing process by creating an eco-map. Switch to environmentally friendly materials such as recycled materials or organically produced cotton for clothing manufacturing. Work with 3rd party certification agencies to test the products and to guarantee fair labor standards. Design for the environment using nature as a model. There are so many possibilities.