MANAGEMENT WORLD
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Best Practices

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Green Benefits Prove Helpful in a Down Economy

In a down economy, companies are becoming cautious about extras they might have considered benefits, but there are a number of eco-friendly benefits that can contribute to their bottom line.

The Greening of HR Survey," a January 2009 study conducted by New York-based Buck Consultants, shows that many employers are going green. More than half of surveyed organizations incorporate environmental management into business operations and have a formal green program in place. Nearly 80 percent use webconferencing or teleconferencing to reduce travel expenses, 57 percent offer telework options, and 52 percent offer rideshare programs for employees.

Employers are becoming cautious in this economy about extras they might have considered benefits, but there are a number of eco-friendly benefits that can contribute to a company's bottom line, says Jennifer Woofter, a consultant at Silver Springs, Maryland-based Strategic Sustainability Consultants. For example, Calvert, a Baltimore, Maryland-based investment management firm, buys walking shoes for employees who walk to work. "It's not a significant cost, but it motivates employees to take the extra step in being environmentally friendly," Woofter says.

Many employers believe there is a business case behind offering green programs. According to "The Greening of HR Survey," 47 percent of executives believe these programs help with attracting and retaining top talent, while 30 percent say that such programs drive profitability. Similarly, in the Society for Human Resource Management's 2009 study "Green Initiatives: What Has Changed in One Year," 12 percent of HR managers surveyed say that green programs increase workforce productivity, up from 6 percent who said the same thing in 2008.

In 2005, Meradia Group, a West Chester, Pennsylvania-based management consulting firm with 17 employees, started a $5,000 incentive for employees who purchased or leased a hybrid vehicle. One employee has taken advantage of the offer, and another employee plans to purchase a hybrid this summer.

CEO Scott Wybranski developed this eco-friendly benefit along with an incentive that encourages employees to take mass transit to client offices. Roughly 75 percent of Wybranski's consultants work off-site at client locations, so he pays 120 percent reimbursement when employees choose mass transit over cars. All of the company's consultants are now using mass transportation, such as the train from Philadelphia to New York.

"I'm trying to create sensitivity and awareness among employees," Wybranski says. But because of the economy, Wybranski—whose firm largely services the investment community—had to temporarily suspend these benefits in early 2009. He will review the decision quarterly and hopes to implement the benefits again soon.

Paybacks

Woofter says smart companies will focus first on green benefits that make financial sense, such as telecommuting and alternate work schedules. She emphasizes that studies show teleworkers are 15 to 45 percent more productive and have lower rates of absenteeism. "It's a perk for employees with real bottom-line benefits for the employer," she says.

The Brick Cos., an Edgewater, Maryland-based real estate owner and developer with 160 to 300 employees (based on the seasonal nature of its golf courses and marinas), recently awarded an Energy Star appliance to its "Environmental Steward of the Year" for efforts to reduce impact on the environment at work and home. Employees nominate co-workers for their environmental success, and the winner is inducted into the company's Hall of Fame.

Shelly Ford, head people person at the Brick Cos., says the program has generated excitement among employees since the first winner was honored at a staff meeting in early 2009. Winner Brad Vaccarella, customer service associate at the company's Potomac Ridge Golf Course, detailed 27 ways he helped the environment at home, such as installing rain barrels to collect water for landscaping, reducing his energy consumption 17 percent and adding clear plastic over windows to reduce drafts.

Brick employees are committed to helping the organization in its 12x12 Program (reduce energy usage 12 percent by 2012), Ford says. The organization has achieved a 9 percent reduction in energy usage across all of its facilities in just seven months, which averages to more than $45,000 in savings through January 2009. Ford says the Brick Cos. won't cut its eco-friendly benefits because they are important to the organization. "The payback comes in employee engagement, their commitment to our 12x12 pledge, and the resulting energy cost savings it brings to our company," Ford says.

David Evans and Associates (DEA), an architectural/engineering firm based in Portland, Oregon, with 886 employees across seven states, works to reduce its carbon footprint by 10 percent at each location. Green strategies vary from office to office. In the Portland headquarters, for example, employees get free transit passes as well as an additional $3 to $6 a day for using alternative transportation such as carpooling, walking, biking or mass transit for their daily commute. Because of the recession, however, DEA has suspended its commuter cash incentives, but it still provides free transit passes. About 50 percent of its Denver employees use alternative transportation at least three days a week, and 34 percent of its Portland employees do the same.

"Our programs not only give people more flexibility, but they also reduce our carbon footprint, and that's just good business," says Paul Horton, director of sustainability at DEA. "When employees feel good about what they are doing, they feel better about working where they are working."

View a 10 minute video on developing a sustainability strategy at:
http://odeo.com/episodes/24842262-Build-a-Strategy-for-Sustainability

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Trends

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Making Decisions for Sustainability

The term "sustainability" is being mentioned quite a bit lately. Usually the term is connected with some sort of environmental effort, such as green practices, renewable energy, recycling, or other similar activities. It seems that since I was a kid in the 1970's, there has been some sort of environmental endeavor that pit "environmentalists" against the business world, and in some cases, the effort and the opposition was well justified. But today, things seem to be different. There is a huge opportunity for business to become actively involved in sustainability efforts that can make an impact not only on the environment but on the bottom-line of organizations. It is from this point of view--that of organizations' and not environmentalists--I'd like to share some thoughts on sustainability.

A couple of years ago I was doing some work with leaders from one of the world's largest retailers. As I shared with them, if I were to cut back on energy usage by only one percent, then I'm not going to make much of an impact. But if they were to cut back on energy usage by only one percent at all of their locations, then that small amount for them would amount to huge reductions in energy usage, plus the reduction in their cost for energy would be significant, as well. After all, at their size, a little bit is a lot. Of course, they were already engaged in energy conservation activities, but the example helped me share with them the concept of scale. It doesn't take much to create an impact when you are as large as they are.

This sort of scale also helps them to leverage other changes, such as a reduction in packaging for items they are selling. After all, people buy their products, take them home, and then toss a huge amount of packaging materials into the garbage as they get the item out of its container. By getting their suppliers to reduce the amount of packaging for products, we end up with a significant reduction in the amount of materials that head to our landfills. But they also see a reduction of space taken up by the product, as well as a reduction in weight, allowing their trucks to haul more products per load. This results in even greater economies in transportation costs and fuel usage, as well as reducing the impact on the environment with fewer vehicle loads.

Of course, these are the obvious advantages that we can see from activities that surround the issue of sustainability, and it makes sense to engage in them because we can see a direct cost savings for the organization and a reduced impact on the environment. And, of course, when an organization is large, small things can have a huge impact. But sometimes things aren't quite so clearly linked, and the impact isn't so clearly evident. For organizations, businesses like yours and mine, sustainability is more than just the impact that our practices might have on the environment. It is about the kinds of decisions we make that can have an impact on our very survivability. Little decisions can set in motion huge consequences later on down the road.

Let's take, for example, organizations such as Enron, WorldCom, and, even more recently, Bear Sterns and Peanut Corporation of America. What do these organizations have in common? They don't exist any more, at least not as the independent companies they once were. They simply didn't survive. And they didn't survive because a series of decisions were made by a variety of people that led to their economic downfall, their bankruptcies, and in some cases, their being acquired by other organizations or simply being sold off in pieces to the highest bidder.

I doubt that anyone working for these companies made the direct decision that they wanted to put their companies out of business. I'm sure the intentions of most of the employees, managers, and executives were made with the thought that they would still be in operation today. However, their decisions did not focus on keeping the business in operation beyond the next few foreseeable quarters--they were not focused on sustainability for the long-term.

It is all too easy to make a decision, a seemingly small one, that has a large impact. Finances are tight, so a decision is made to cut back on costs. One of those costs is maintenance, so it is decided to limit what maintenance is done. Cutting back on maintenance allows machinery and buildings to fall into disrepair. As a result, there are leaks in the roof, contaminated rainwater falls on machinery that is processing food, and soon you have a salmonella outbreak that results in huge quantities of food being recalled. But what's worse, several people die from food poisoning from the tainted food. Liabilities mount and soon the organization can't survive. The doors are closed; employees are out of work; millions of dollars are lost; lives are jeopardized and families are forever impacted. One simple decision has a negative impact on so many people for such a long time, and, of course, the organization is not sustained. This simple but true story demonstrates how seemingly small and immediately impacting decisions can end up resulting in long-term and detrimental consequences.

In the last issue of Management World I shared four areas in which we should be setting goals for our organizations. These areas were Relationships, Economics, Action-Ability, and Longevity. Most organizations are very good at setting Economic goals. Some are good at setting Relationship goals, at least when it comes to taking care of customers. And there are even some organizations that are good at insuring that their processes and operations are optimized so that costs and quality are extensively controlled. But there are far too many organizations that are focused more on the near term than on the long-term impact of decisions made on a day-to-day basis in their companies.

One of the things that I share in ***Leadership Lessons From the Medicine Wheel*** is that many American Indian nations would approach decision making based on the impact that the decision would have on seven generations. In other words, if we make this decision, not only should we be concerned with the impact it will have on us today or tomorrow, or even next quarter or next year, but we should be looking much further down the road to see what kind of impact it might have on those who will follow us as they work for our organization. We should be thinking that there will, indeed, be those who will follow us, and that our organization will be here long after we have left not only the organization, but this world.

If we believe that our organization will be here long after we are gone, and if we strive for this and intend that it should survive, then we may find ourselves making different decisions than those we normally make. As we make decisions, we begin to ask not only how does this solve our problems now, but what kind of future problems might this make for us, our employees, our customers and the future survivability of our organization if we take this action today. With this long-range focus we can begin to ask what kind of decisions we can make today that will solve problems for our organization in the future, and maybe even keep it from experiencing those problems at all.

All we have to do is simply change our perspective and our focus from immediate gratification to one of long-term results. We must stop managing organizations from quarter to quarter or year by year.

Instead, we must manage them for the long-term and beyond the time when we will be with the organization. In the end, not only does our organization win, but we win too; along with our children, our grandchildren, and their grandchildren's grandchildren. After all, what kind of world would you like them to live in? It is up to you to make good, long-term decisions that impact the sustainability of your organization and its impact on the world. Remember, small decisions by people at all levels of the organization can have a great impact. What kind of impact will your daily decisions have in your organization?

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Productivity

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Why Smart Managers Will Capitalize First [on Sustainability]

-- An interview with Richard M. Locke, Professor at the MIT Sloan School of Management

A founder of MIT Sloan's Laboratory for Sustainable Business says the best way to get people to take sustainability seriously is to frame it as it really is: not only a challenge that will affect every aspect of management but, for first movers, a source of enormous competitive advantage.

Interview Focus: As sustainability—economic, environmental, social, and personal—emerges to become the defining business issue of our times, what do leading managers need to know?
Locke: A lot. Unlike what most managers believe about sustainability, there actually *is* good news. There's opportunity here.

When you hear business people talk about sustainability—about what it means and what they can do—what are they generally thinking of?

Locke: Right now they're mostly thinking of Al Gore. We've bombarded people with evidence about environmental issues, some of which is convincing, some of which other people don't believe. It's the model that says: Sustainability is about the environment, and things are bad. And the reaction to that is, "Oh, God, there are big problems, but they're not so immediate, so someday I'll do something, but I don't have to do something right away." A McKinsey study showed that a big chunk of business people are saying, "I'll wait for technology to get me out of it." So, we've kind of frightened people, and they know they should do something. But what we need to do is say, "There are other companies like you or like you want to be who are already paying attention to sustainability, and look what they're doing." When I talk to start-up companies or medium-sized companies that don't have a lot of money—who aren't in the Fortune 500, say—their initial reaction often is, "Don't lecture me on yet another added cost." We have to show them that it is possible for them to act on sustainability issues, and that it's actually going to be good for their business.

To leaders and managers, what do you think "sustainability" means?

Locke: We don't have a common language about this yet. I hear two different kinds of definitions in the circles that I travel in. One is from people who are fans of sustainability in terms of environment, and who say that we have to preserve and conserve the kinds of air, water, and land resources that we have, or else we're going to be off balance and undermine the carrying capacity of the Earth in terms of human life. The other conception is held by people who basically think of sustainability as a threat–usually a looming threat of carbon tax regulation. That McKinsey survey of CEOs showed that though 60% think sustainability is a problem, the vast majority of them say that they're not really doing much about it. And yet, some 80% expect that within five years they'll have some sort of carbon regulation in their home countries. So many of those people think of sustainability as just something that's going to be bad for business, as opposed to thinking that it can be an opportunity for business. Which I'm convinced it is.

Your definition of sustainability is different.

Locke: I build on the Brundtland Commission's definition of sustainability, which focuses on using resources today in a way that ensures there'll be resources to meet the needs of future generations. I look at not only the environment but at energy and social issues like human development and poverty alleviation as well. People hear about the environment but they don't often talk about, say, labor justice. But that's one of the keys. Climate, environment, energy, social standards—they're all linked. One of the metaphors we've used a lot over the last couple of years is to think of sustainability as a fabric. You pull a thread and everything comes together. Look at the example of greenhouse gas emissions. If we really care about reducing gas emissions, policy change in the United States won't be enough. We have to care about looking at some of the big emerging markets, especially China and India. Now, why are they emitting so much carbon? Well, because they're building a lot of power plants. And why are they building power plants? Because they need the energy to fuel their development. And suddenly a conversation that started around greenhouse gas emissions has shifted to the quality of development and social standards and water and waste and people. They're all related.

What do you see driving companies to face sustainability issues?

One of the drivers is going to be whatever kinds of regulations appear around carbon. The European Union is already doing some things, and individual states in the United States, like California, have already become much more astute. There will be other kinds of regulations like this. And those regulations initially will be an added cost. They may drive out some of the less productive, less efficient, more polluting companies.

What else will confront managers with strategic choices that they'll have to make?

Some developing areas are going to be hit with scarce water and problems around water purity. The developing countries, of course, are going to be hit even harder by the financial crisis. And I worry, quite honestly, about places that don't have much of a buffer, where suddenly there may be no jobs and no public services and no tax revenues. I think that we're going to see an uptick in conflict, and that's going to make it really difficult to do business in some places. You know, you can start looking for uranium in Congo if you want, but who knows what's going to happen to society there.

What will trigger new focus on sustainability-related management strategy inside organizations?

In addition to pressure from government because of the regulation, you're going to have pressure from customers. All the surveys and experimental work for consumer goods, whether it's about fair-trade certified or ethical or green products, all seems to suggest that people really value these things. I think big pressure also is going to come from within the business itself—not from a missionary CEO, but from some of the functional managers. My theory is that it's some group on the periphery, usually middle level, that figures out a solution to some real problem. They show that it works, and then they can start diffusing it. And then it gets embraced by the top. I seldom think that it's a top-down thing. For example, the redesign of supply chains to make them less intrusive on the environment is happening for clear cost reasons.

How does the redesign of supply chains become part of a sustainability equation?

One of the Nike people told me that they had built [their former] supply chain based on the assumption of cheap labor, cheap energy, decreasing costs of transportation and logistics, and no externalities. All of those are gone. So, now, some of the commodities are going down, but energy is still really expensive. Transportation costs are still very expensive. So you have companies like Nike, like Proctor & Gamble, that are thinking of literally reconfiguring their supply chains to have regional hubs and fewer suppliers. I believe that there will be some interesting stimulus coming from buyers and suppliers who can step up. They are going to be able to maintain relationships they have with their global buyers in a way that the others aren't.

Why is that? Because there's some kind of competitive advantage?

What I've heard from companies on the supplier side and the buyer side is that, in their view, companies that have their act together around sustainability usually have their act together in other things, too. So those are the companies they want to work with. Efficiency (lower unit costs), quality, reliability—often these "positive" attributes of companies go hand in hand, managers will tell you. Now think about sustainability. If a company is good at developing systems that deal with health and safety, and/or treating waste and water, and/or devising innovative ways to reduce energy consumption, and so forth, they usually have their act together on many other, fundamental, how-they-do-business fronts. In other words, companies that have thought hard about how to establish various management systems that promote more sustainable business practices are also companies that have thought hard about how to be more efficient or innovative or differentiate their products and services in the market.

Sustainability becomes a proxy for management quality. This is a quick way for others, be they buyers or customers or potential partners, to get information about vendors or any other value-chain partner and what kinds of systems they have. You can be an efficient company and probably even make good quality goods without being focused on sustainability. But I think it's very hard for you to be a sustainable company and not also be good at those other things. And that's why you have things like GRI [Global Reporting Initiative] and others which businesses use to signal to other companies, "We're serious about this. It's not just a PR thing."

What are the impediments to moving forward? What will companies and managers have to overcome to make action happen on the sustainability front?
The first thing they have to fight are their own assumptions, their own mental model, which is that to embrace this is an extra cost or a drag on business. Especially now, during a period of financial crisis and declining demand, they're going to say, "Look, we're already having a hard time keeping our numbers. Don't ask us to do anything on investment." But now is a great time for companies to revisit how they're thinking about sustainability and what they're doing, to see the opportunities to reduce consumption and change the way they're doing things. It's a cost savings that will set them up for the next growth spurt. In the end I think that efforts to act on sustainability issues are going to be a real stimulus for innovation—that's one impact that I see clearly in the near-term future. But leaders and managers still have to be convinced that it's possible.

Locke's Sustainability Takeaways

Definition of Sustainability

- Meet today's needs so needs of future generations aren't compromised
- Environment, economy, social standards, personal balance all liked

Drivers of Sustainability (with the biggest implications for managers)

- Government regulations, especially around carbon emissions
- Pressure from customers
- Environmental factors such as water scarcity
- Cost cutting measures developed internally

Threats and Opportunities

- Threat: financial pressures of current economic crisis
- Opp: cos. strong on sustainability perceived as having superior management overall

Obstacles to Acting on Sustainability Problems/Opportunities

- Assumptions that sustainability initiatives mean extra costs
- Lack of empirical evidence and visible role models of successful sustainability strategies

Other

- People are unwisely waiting "for technology to get me out of it"
- Conservation is not the same as sustainability
- We need to combat silo mentality of competing ideas not collaborating

About Richard Locke. Like most leading thinkers about the intersection of sustainability and business, Richard Locke got here from somewhere else. Trained as a political scientist, he became known early on for expertise in supply chain labor practices and for advocating that social and economic concerns be integrated into curriculum and research. Now, as the Alvin J., Siteman Professor of Entrepreneurship at the MIT Sloan School of Management and a Professor in the political science department at MIT, Locke's interdisciplinary cast of mind is evident in all the work he does—especially his exploration of sustainability. He has helped spearhead the development of MIT Sloan's Laboratory for Sustainable Business (S-Lab), which, notably, not only investigates sustainable-management issues in the classroom but puts students inside companies that are grappling with sustainability challenges on every front. Locke's own current research focuses on improving labor and environmental standards in global supply chains. As a result of his research on Nike and its efforts to improve working conditions among its suppliers, Locke was awarded the Faculty Pioneer Award from the Aspen Institute's Business and Society Program.

Excerpt from MIT Sloan Management Review; An Interview with Richard M. Locke, January 14, 2009. Read the full interview and others of its type at: *http://sloanreview.mit.edu/beyond-green/sustainability-as-fabric-and-why-smart-managers-will-capitalize-first/*.

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CM Article

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Managerial Stewardship & Sustainability?

The trend toward employing Sustainable Business Practices (SBP) calls for managers to operate in a socially responsible manner that honors people, the planet, and profit. This is commonly referred to as the Triple Bottom Line (TBL).

SBP should focus on the concept that as managers, we have to ensure first and foremost that our company makes money. Then, we can afford to be proactive in our social and environmental focus.

The modern use of the word "sustainability" entered the business lexicon in 1987 with the Bruntland Commission's (aka World Commission on Environment and Development) publication of *Our Common Future**. The Industrial Revolution, WWII and Post-WWII, along with the development of mass production and expanded use of chemicals (petroleum, persistent toxins, heavy metals, etc.), preceded a focus on SBP.

Other significant historical events leading to the birth of SBP include Love Canal in Niagara Falls, New York where in 1978, 82 different compounds, 11 of them suspected carcinogens, permeated upward through the soil, their containers oozing contents onto the properties of 100 homes and a public school built on the banks of the canal. The canal was operated by Hooker Chemical Company as an industrial dump twenty five years earlier. Additional significant events that led to a focus on SBP include globalization/development and increased demand on fewer resources, climate change, erosion, regulatory development, and conflict between industrial and environmental interests.

Author Paul Hawken's books <u>*The Ecology of Commerce*</u> (1993) & <u>*Natural Capitalism*</u> (1999) became classic books on business and the environment having a large impact on SBP. In his book Natural Capitalism**, Hawken describes a future in which "...business and environmental interests increasingly overlap and in which businesses can better satisfy their customers' needs, increase profits, and help solve environmental problems, all at the same time."

Natural Capital is referred to by Hawken as "...the natural resources and ecosystem services that make possible all economic activity. These services are of immense economic value and some are literally priceless, since they have no known substitutes."

Natural capital is "...being degraded and liquidated by the wasteful use of such resources as energy, materials, water, fiber, and topsoil" according to Hawken. Current business practices do not always take into consideration the worth of these assets, which is rising along with their scarceness.

Some managers at prominent US companies understand and apply Hawken's perspectives. These include furniture retailer IKEA, who requires all of its stores to reuse, recycle, or produce energy from 75% of their waste. IKEA & the World Wildlife Fund Conservation Partnership work together to promote responsible forestry, better cotton cultivation, and to address climate change. Herman Miller, a Zeeland, Michigan manufacturer of office furniture, has won several environmental awards over the past decade. Worthy of note is Herman Miller's Mirra chair that is built from 42% recycled materials and is 96% recyclable. Cascade Engineering of Michigan has demonstrated their commitment to Natural Capital conservation by establishing a Neighborhood Recycling Center that has been helping the Grand Rapids community in recycling, reducing and reusing a myriad of items from ink cartridges to cell phones.

What IKEA, Cascade Engineering and Herman Miller illustrate is a previously unthinkable thought espoused by management in today's business world--the thought that there are successful managers who know there is more to good business than the next profitable quarterly bottom line!

Several definitions exist for sustainability. The one that seems to be the most inclusive and long-term focused is: 'protecting and enhancing long-term cultural, ecological & economic health and vitality.' Sustainability should not involve a win-lose mindset. Instead, the fundamental SBP question is - Should managers be good stewards? A steward is someone who has been assigned another's assets and charged with the responsibility of managing them, in the owner's best interest, to produce a win-win.

Profit should not be the only focus in SBP and should be viewed as a way to an end, not an end in itself. It is almost as though a focus on SBP produces a 'moral economy' of sort, wherein the manager's right to financial opportunity is balanced by duty or responsibility to society. This means that managers should focus on primary stakeholders including shareholders, employees, customers, suppliers, government, and the local community. A sole focus on profits fails to provide sufficient meaningful long-term purpose to ensure stakeholders' commitment.

SBP professes to management's understanding that every action you take in business has two components: an impact on profits and an impact on the world. Staking out a path to where profitability and social benefits blend is a point where managers should aim to enable them to remain successful in the long term. After all, proactive stewardship results in a long term focus.

Sustainability requires a threefold focus. First, there is financial capital (profit/performance) including sales growth, return on equity and profitability. Second, there is a focus on social (people) capital. Social capital is created when the company and the community collaborate with each other to find reciprocally advantageous solutions to common problems. The final focal point of Sustainability should be environment (planet /ecological) capital. Managers seek to protect the environment by implementing environmental management programs while understanding every stage of the life cycles of company products.

SBP positively impacts a company's value chain. A value chain (stream) involves the dynamic actions, exchanges, and relationships with all customers (stakeholders) involved in the transformation and delivery of raw materials. Along with end-of-life considerations resulting in products or services that create value for the customer and society.

The TBL is all about managers behaving in a responsible/proactive fashion. While recognizing human altruism or "noblesse oblige" in terms of assisting other people and the planet. "Noblesse oblige" means that wealth, influence and status come with responsibilities. The responsibilities of good steward managers!

In the final analysis, managers who operate as good stewards attempt to 'do the right thing' in regards to society, the environment and people. And, they simultaneously figure out how to make 'doing the right thing' good business.

*World Commission On Environment and Development. (1987). *Our Common Future*. New York: Oxford University Press.
**Hawken, P., Lovins, H., & Lovins, A. (1999). *Natural Capitalism: Creating the Next Industrial Revolution*. Boston: Little, Brown and Co.

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With the right preparation and planning, going green in the office doesn't have to be a difficult process. By getting everyone involved, from upper management to sales associates, your company can start doing its part to conserve energy and cut down greenhouse gas emissions. Go ahead, go green and get started today.

Article from Training Time, April 7, 2009, http://www.trainingtime.com/npps/story.cfm?nppage=502

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