

Forming a green team

Play this right, and everyone wins

By K.J. McCorry

Whether you are a small company that can't allocate a designated resource to sustainability planning, or a large company with only one person assigned, creating a team of employees to support the company's green initiatives can be effective.

These teams, commonly known as 'Green Teams', are formal committees of selected staff within an organization who have been appointed or volunteered to develop a company's environment and social programs. Employees understand the company and its operations well and as such can be one of the best sources of innovation and sustainable plan development, making them ideal candidates for 'Green Team' members.

Establishing a 'Green Team' can help get green initiatives and projects developed and implemented quickly. Further, these 'Green Teams' can be a catalyst within the organization to build momentum and entice employee engagement in the organization's sustainability initiatives.

Choosing Team

Because sustainability is not just a project, but a program that is embedded into your organization, it is vital to have the right team members. Not only do you want green-minded individuals but also key staff from each department that can support and ensure success of the green initiatives. It is also important to have one executive level team member.

These execs can ensure decisions are in alignment with the company's strategic objectives and foster buy-in from the rest of the executive staff. Make sure one of the team members is a veteran of the organization and can provide historical context.

Ideally, limit the size to 10 to 12 people to ensure a manageable and workable team. Because of the breadth and depth of sustainability initiatives, participating on green teams can give employees a unique opportunity to enhance leadership skills and affect change within the organization.

Clarify Role and Function

Once a ‘Green Team’ or steering committee is formed, it is important to clarify expectations of its function. This clarity will assist in selecting members for the ‘Green Team’ and their subsequent commitment. The following are possible responsibilities of a ‘Green Team’:

- Conduct and analyze sustainability assessment/s
- Set sustainability priorities, goals and develop an annual plan
- Coordinate, launch and support sub-task teams
- Advise management on sustainability opportunities
- Track, monitor and analyze sustainability metrics
- Address and manage sustainability initiatives challenges and constraints
- Develop an internal communication plan and process
- Provide education, support and advise to other employees

Along with identifying the function of the team, it will be important to clarify the decision making power the team will have. Provide clear boundaries for the team on specific areas including regulatory, legal and financial. These boundaries should be approved at the executive level.

Clarify Logistics

Once a team is formed, encourage the team to address meeting logistics guidelines to ensure success working together. This can be done with a facilitator, sustainability consultant or the team lead.

First have the team decide on a team lead, someone that will assist in coordinating meetings and ensure accountability of the group. Have the team itself decide how often it meets, communication and other ground rules in working together. To keep the momentum, it will be important for the team to meet on a regular basis either weekly or monthly.

‘Green Teams’ can help propel momentum by keeping employees engaged and informed. It is important for supervisors to provide support to these ‘Green Teams’ whose members must carve out time from their daily responsibilities to ensure success of the green program.

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