

Vail's Greener Pastures: Green? What's in it for me?

Vail's Greener Pastures: Answering this question is key to making your business more sustainable

CASSIE PENCE

GREENER PASTURES

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VAIL, Colorado – It never occurred to me that people could practice sustainability without actually caring about the environment.

It was an idea suggested by K.J. McCorry, CEO of eco-efficiency, a sustainable consulting company based out of Boulder, during a greening your business workshop that took place Friday morning at the Antlers in Vail.

A huge, and often challenging, step in making your business more sustainable, McCorry says, is changing the mindset and culture of an organization to an eco-culture. This is difficult because there will be employees – including upper management and CEOs, whose commitment is crucial to greening business – that are resistant to the concept of sustainability. They don't believe in global warming. The environment just isn't a priority for them. Plus, changing to do the “right thing” is often perceived as extra work. And who needs work added to our busy lifestyle?

So what McCorry suggests is giving these employees reasons why a sustainability plan is important to them. Where tree-hugging reasoning may fall short with some folks, helping the business improve efficiency and reduce costs – all side effects of sustainability – may resonate enough to inspire change. And does it really matter why they do it, as long as they do it?

McCorry gave some great real-business examples of how companies engaged their employees into positive environmental change. One story was about a company in Oregon with big utility bills. A higher-up posted the company's bill in the elevator for everyone to see. No one issued a memo, there was no sign posted, just the monthly astronomical utility bill.

After three months, the company reduced its energy consumption by 15 percent simply by showing employees exactly how costly energy is to the company. No one told them what to do or why it's important for the health of the planet. It was just real data, real information that prompted the employees to turn off lights and computers at night. Turning off computers each night, by the way, according to McCorry, will save a business \$150 a day. And some smart businesses are making utility costs part of the IT budget, giving that department more invested interest in making sure lights and computers are shut down at the end of the work day.

Training employees and providing information were just two of the 10 steps McCorry recommended to help create an eco-culture in the work place. Other steps included how to determine your company's purpose for becoming more sustainable and how to align this new objective with company strategy so it doesn't create more work for employees.

Another step was how to determine goals, and the optimist in me really loved the fact that McCorry suggested incorporating “stretch goals” in this list. Stretch goals are ambitious goals like zero waste, paperless office and to procure 100 percent renewable energy. By setting the bar high, McCorry says employees act differently, and are often more productive.

So, it's time to move mountains. If business is destroying the world, than business can save the world. If you work in an office or own a business, create a green team today and begin your sustainability plan. See the info box for resources to help you get started.

Businesses helping business

Online resources to help companies become more sustainable

- Eagle Valley Alliance for Sustainability – www.eaglevalleyalliance.org
- Destination Preservation, a program by the Vail Valley Partnership – www.vailvalleypartnership.com
- CORE – www.corecolorado.org
- Alliance for Sustainable Colorado – www.sustainablecolorado.org
- Colorado Association for Recycling – www.cafr.org
- eco-efficiency – www.eco-efficiency.com

Freelance writer Cassie Pence is passionate about living a more sustainable lifestyle. She and her husband, Captain Vacuum, own Organic Housekeepers, a green cleaning company. She is interested in hearing your company's sustainable success stories. Contact her at cassie@organichousekeepers.com.

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