

Sustainable Office Practices

Tara Kimbrell Cole looks at six channels for change that can make the office more Sustainable.

When evaluating the financial impact of taking action towards Sustainability on the company balance sheet, one must look through the entire business, supply chain and system not just the office to realize absolute bottom line results. Here are six channels for change that can be made to make the office more sustainable.

1 Raise Awareness

Changing the rules can help but without buy in, commitment and the discovery of overall financial benefits, real impact will be out of reach. Therefore, top of the list is to raise company-wide awareness, understanding and motivation. Two effective activities are:

Screen the Academy Award winning documentary, *An Inconvenient Truth*. It doesn't matter if some have already seen it. The first viewing can be shocking but the second is more potent in 'driving' people to action. This film continues to be the most effective means to explain this somewhat complex subject in terms we can all understand.

Make the screening enjoyable and use it to develop relationships and team building. This is a genuine team building exercise in which we all have an enormous stake; life as we know it and, for many, actual survival. What better real bonding exercise could there be?

Secondly, shift company-wide perspective to focus on the positive bottom line impact and business opportunities in Sustainability, not the least of which is sustainable profitability. This may even include utilising your new Sustainable office practises to your business' advantage by 're-positioning', 're-branding' and 'boosting' your company's image.

After the screening organise a committee to develop and propose a strategy and implementation plan. Other channels for change along with specific examples are:

2 A Recycling Scheme

- Recycled paper for the office. Utilise both sides of every page. Put the recycled paper symbol on your company letterhead. If this shift is too expensive to undertake 100 %, phase it in stages and let the savings made in other areas cover the increased expense in utilising recycled paper. Internally recycle: use the back of junk mail or mail to be thrown away for printing drafts, internal memos, etc.
- Organise separate waste bins to segregate recyclable waste
- Phase in recycled toilet paper

3 Energy Efficiency

- Gradually increase the temperature on the air conditioner from 16° to 19°, to 21°, to 23°. Then see if you can take it to 25°. Many people wear winter clothes to survive in freezing offices. Give warning notices when starting temperature reductions, so all can dress for the new office 'weather'.
- Turn lights and equipment off whenever they're not in use and at night at the main switch box.

4 Transportation

- Have an incentive scheme for employees to purchase hybrid vehicles, install compressed natural gas kits in their cars, create car pools, or take public transportation.
- Travel less: The 'Freakonomics' phenomenon in large enterprise business travel is that executives are encouraged to fly more because they are accumulating free miles for personal travel. Identify non-essential travel. Driving efficiency into business travel can significantly improve the bottom line. Some appointments can be done on the phone. Use SKYPE — it's free. Do a cost analysis of the new generation of video conferencing, which is dynamically changing that function and experience.

5 Purchasing practices


- Buy regionally: the further a product is transported, the greater the emissions.
- Choose energy-efficient equipment from computers to printers and copiers.
- Use suppliers with buy-back

schemes for old computers.

- Buy sustainable office cleaning products that don't include dangerous petrochemicals. This will improve the health of employees, while reducing green house gases emitted through the product manufacturing and life cycle.
- Switch to compact fluorescent lighting.
- Purchase a water filter system and dispenser, thereby reducing the burning of fossil fuels used in the packaging and delivery of bottled water.
- Use drinking glasses that can be washed and reused.
- 'Plant' at least one real potted plant in each room of the office to offset emissions. Throw out synthetic plants that release Volatile Organic Compounds, which are hazardous to your respiratory health.

6 Minimise waste

- Eliminate unnecessary products manufactured from petrochemicals such as Styrofoam (which never bio-degrades) and plastic cups, plastic bottles (which take 100 years to bio-degrade); and although some are recyclable, plastic bottles and bags are polluting our food and natural resources. The greenhouse gases emitted in their manufacturing and transportation are massive. There are affordable bio-degradable alternatives produced regionally from natural resins and even tapioca.
- When purchasing, consider the packaging of all products: less is more.

The Asian Productivity Organisation publishes annually an Eco-Products Directory for Sustainable Production and Consumption (a critical resource for every office). An abundance of information and learning opportunities are available online, including links to all country boards in Asia. (www.apo-tokyo.org) 

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