

A Sustainable Environment: Our Obligation to Protect God's Gift

by
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The Demand for Adopting Sustainability Continues to Grow Rapidly

The sustainability movement probably took off right after the Brundtland Commission of 1987 published a report on “Our Common Future” and established the definition of “sustainable development”, now called sustainability. This definition can be abbreviated to “meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”. This was later enhanced with the development of the “triple bottom line”, by John Elkington, that sustainability consists of the environmental, social, and economic issues – or planet, people, profit.

The implementation of sustainability has been growing ever since with college programs teaching strategies and companies of all sizes integrating the concept into its operations. According to a recent report by University College London (UCL), the U.S. green economy was estimated to have generated over \$1.3 trillion in revenue in 2016 while the global green economy was close to \$8 trillion. The green economy is defined as efforts to reduce carbon emissions, become more resource efficient, and be social inclusive. In a three year period ending 2016, the green economy grew by 20%, and this also included a corresponding increase in employment which amounted to 1.5 million jobs.

There is no question that this green economy must grow and will continue to grow. For example, China is expected to add 13 million clean energy jobs from 2016 to next year. And with the commitment of countries all over the world to reduce carbon emissions, the green economy will not only continue to grow but perhaps even more rapidly. In addition to fighting carbon emissions, we will be increasing our efforts to become more efficient with the use of water as well as more efficient with our natural resources which are currently consumed at a rate equal to 1.7 earths.

Even though the green economy has been growing rapidly, there are two things we can do to make it grow faster and more effectively. As more companies are committing to operating in a sustainable manner, they create a position or department responsible for implementing sustainability in the company. They do this by promoting someone into that position or by hiring someone with experience in that area. This is a good start, but it is not really enough. A company should not just create a position or department, but rather should imbed the concept of sustainability in the culture of the company. Everyone in the company should have some understanding of the concept of environmental and social sustainability so that they can work together and adopt new sustainability operations for the company. There are companies that have done this and have been successful such as Dow, SAIC, and Cargill, for example, although there are many more – but not enough.

Another approach to having the green economy not only grow but takeoff is in the education of the employees companies hire. There are numerous programs in business schools offering master degrees in Sustainability Management or Environmental Management and Sustainability. These are excellent programs, but the business schools should be doing more. Sustainability should not be treated as a discipline such as marketing, accounting, finance, or operations, but should be treated as a concept imbedded in each of these disciplines. In other words, someone studying marketing should be exposed to strategies in marketing the concept of sustainability. Someone studying finance should understand the financial benefits of a sustainable company and its impact on Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) investing. In an operations management course, sustainability should be imbedded in the various operations strategies so the outcome is more efficient in product consumption and more efficient in carbon emission reduction. Anyone graduating with an MBA should have an excellent understanding of the sustainability concept regardless of his or her major.

With this approach, training all business students will have additional benefits as the implementation of sustainability will be carried on at religious organizations, NGOs (Non-governmental Organization), and even at home. This will soon become a normal way of life.