

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

by
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The Importance of Integrating Sustainability

By now, I am sure that you have read or heard people talking about sustainability in the context of the environment. But what does it mean? Simply stated, sustainability refers to meeting today's needs without preventing future generations from meeting their needs. This includes needs for energy, food, shelter, clothing, water, clean air, and disposal of waste. It is very critical that we conserve each and every one of these resources or we may have some catastrophes real soon. While each of us can do our share, the big impact will come from corporations which need to set an example by integrating sustainability into their business strategy.

In a September 2009 article in Harvard Business Review by prominent management thinkers C.K. Prahalad, R. Nidumolu and M.R. Rangaswami, they state that "sustainability is the key driver for innovation. In the future, only companies that make sustainability a goal will achieve competitive advantage". In addition, according to a report by Accenture for the 2010 United Nations Global Compact study of chief executive officers, 93% of the global CEOs believe sustainability issues will be critical to the future success of their business, and 96% believe sustainability issues should be fully integrated into the strategy and operations of a company. .

Further, I also believe that it is not sufficient for a company to assign the responsibility of sustainability to one person. Unfortunately, this is exactly what most companies are doing, and in 90% of the cases this person given a title with sustainability in it has little knowledge of it. Sustainability is not a discipline like marketing, sales, operations or accounting, but rather it is a concept that permeates all disciplines or corporate departments. So it is critical that managers in all departments must have knowledge of sustainability in order to develop, extend or maintain a competitive advantage.

Likewise, business schools should imbed sustainability into all of the appropriate courses in an MBA curriculum. Again, sustainability should not be treated as a discipline as it makes no sense to earn a degree in sustainability. Whether the degree is in marketing, finance, operations, or management, the student should have had the opportunity to understand how the concept of sustainability enhances each of the disciplines. If business school students, or even engineering and liberal arts students, had the opportunity to understand the sustainability concept and its benefits, the mindset of sustainability would be far-reaching within a company or organization.

But that doesn't mean that all is lost. For a corporation to develop a sustainable business strategy, it is critical that the top management endorse this way of thinking.

This can easily be instilled in the executive office of any organization by having someone knowledgeable and passionate about sustainability present the case for sustainability to the top management in such a convincing manner that it will be readily accepted. This is exactly what happened at Wal-Mart and this company is not only trying to operate as a sustainable company, but it is also requiring its suppliers to do the same. Wal-Mart is having a major, positive impact on manufacturing companies worldwide.

Once the corporate officers have bought in on the concept, a more detailed training program is in order for the department heads of the organization. This can be done by sending these people to a near-by graduate program, or to be more cost effective, bring the instructor to the organization. Everyone will then hear the same story.

The last step in implementing sustainability is to obtain assistance from a consultant, if it is needed. Again, one needs to be careful on selecting a consultant as many of them have added this concept to their service offerings even though they may not know much about it. They just realize that this consultancy service is, or will be, in great demand.

If you are tired of reading about sustainability, get used to it as this very important concept will be with us for a long, long time.