Leading by Example: Green it Like You Mean it

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Once upon a time, the act of saving the environment seemed to be limited to a yearly celebration called Earth Day where, like New Year's Eve, people made resolutions that they wouldn't necessarily keep.

For decades, the idea of saving the environment and contributing to a healthier world seemed like a great idea, but it was either too big a task for one individual to handle or a seemingly time-consuming activity that would cut into money-making time.

Then things started to change at work, at school and at home. From unthinkable gas prices and a tough job market to skyrocketing health care costs, many folks came to a similar conclusion: to become more resourceful and live better.

There has been a rise in eating local, for example. Not only does it taste better than the grocery store, but buying local and eating what's in season saves money and the resources that it costs to transport food to one-stop-shopping nationwide.

Businesses are looking more closely at their waste — paper, energy to power an office 24/7 and throwing dollars away on everything from disposable coffee cups to plastic packaging for products.

There are many ways to kick-start your green initiative at work and operate your business in an eco-friendly and sustainable way. At Cheetah Learning and Cheetah

Power, we are committed to growing virtually with all of our employees working out of their homes. It's saved us tremendously on real estate costs and also made our carbon footprint smaller. The good news is that there are many ways to be greener. Let's take a look at how other businesses are doing it.

Doing it and Doing it Well

To get your juices flowing, here are six businesses that are doing it and doing it well. These multinational businesses received *Natural Health Magazine's "Green Choice" Awards* in 2009 for their excellence in leading by example across the globe.

Wal-Mart: although many have been skeptical of this retailer's green practices in the past, Wal-Mart now has a very large-scale environmental plan of action to power each of their stores with 100 percent renewable energy. Wal-Mart plans to set aside $500 million a year to increase fuel efficiency within their truck fleet, decrease energy consumption in their stores, decrease solid wastes from their stores, and a number of other environmental endeavors.

Starbucks: with the company's "bean-to-cup" motto and approach to business, Starbucks uses environmentally savvy methods at each stage of production. Made from post-consumer goods, Starbucks' recycled cup-sleeves saved more than 78,000 trees in 2006.

Verizon: its HopeLine initiative saved more than 5.6 million cell phones from ending up in landfills and were, instead, used to fund more than $6.3 million in cash grants to domestic violence agencies. Verizon has played a leadership role in encouraging customers and shareholders to choose paperless options. In addition, Verizon Wireless signed agreements to deploy smart power grids and continues to upgrade its fiber-optic network with equipment that is four times more efficient and reduces cooling costs. This is equivalent to keeping as many as 16,000 cars off the road annually.

Whole Foods: this organic food chain was the first company to buy the amount of wind-energy credits to compensate for 100 percent of the electricity they consumed. Whole Foods has eliminated their use of disposable plastic bags and replaced them with reusable bags for customers. These reusable bags are made from recycled plastic bottles.

Aveda: this natural-beauty product manufacturer uses primarily organic rather than man-made materials in their products. Aveda also employs wind power in their manufacturing facility to reduce electricity consumption, and they use 100 percent recycled packing materials. On top of these commendable business practices, Aveda funds wildlife preservations, and since 1999 has raised $8 million for environmental causes.

Discovery Channel: this company is not only green in the information it communicates through its many environmentally informative television shows, but through its company actions and practices. The Discovery Channel has compensated for their carbon dioxide emissions through making equal contributions

to environmental feats and projects and using energy-efficient lighting, architecture, and water systems in their company headquarters. In August, Discovery Channel took over the leading environmental lifestyle website, treehugger.com, as part of their initiatives to inform people about important environmental issues. Most impressive of all, the company set aside $50 million to create green television programming, beginning with a show entitled *Ten Ways to Save the Planet.*

Small Steps for a Large Feat

I often hear people talk about the enormity of being green, and then the Project Manager in me comes alive and I have to remind them that anything is possible with a project plan that can break the most monstrous goals down into doable and realistic parts.

Develop a “Green Business Check List” to get your company thinking about ways it can behave in a greener and more sustainable manner. Here are a few areas to consider with a sample question to get you started. There are plenty more for you to go through, but this can serve as a useful thought starter.

Corporate and Environmental Social Responsibility

Do you only invest in environmentally conscious companies?

Use your investment portfolio to only support business organizations or industries that operate in an environmentally conscious way.

Energy, Water and Heat

Do you make use of natural light by keeping windows and skylights clean and clear? Don’t turn lights on in the middle of the day if you have sufficient natural light coming into your office.

Do you regularly check and fix any leaking taps?

Over the long term a leaking tap can waste a significant amount of water. Post a number to call near sinks so someone may fix it right away.

Do you keep radiators free of office furniture?

Make sure that furniture does not block the radiators as otherwise the heat will be wasted.

Environmental Policy

Have you set up a ‘Green Team’ or ‘Eco Champions’ team in your company? By getting your employees involved and part of the greening process, they will feel valued.

Housekeeping

Do you have a collection point for Aluminum, Glass, or Plastic?

Information Communication Technology

Do you have a green IT infrastructure?

There are now over 1.1 billion computers in operation worldwide, collectively producing about one billion tons of CO2 through their electricity requirements. Also contributing to the earth's pollution are outdated computer equipment, mobile phones and electronic gadgets that make up 5% of the world's garbage. Considering our continuing demand to have the latest and greatest in multitasking phones and so on, that's an alarming amount of products to be tossed aside each year.

Office Supplies

Do you have a printer that can print on both sides?

If you don't have a printer that can print on both sides, then consider investing in one once your lease for the existing one is up for renewal or when your existing one no longer works.

Travel and Transportation

Rather than traveling to meetings have you invested in suitable technology for conference calls? It is worthwhile investigating alternatives such as using iChat or SKYPE for meetings that require face time.

Wildlife and Biodiversity

Have you created a wildlife area around your office?

Even if you only have a concrete courtyard you can still create a wildlife area by planting some native plants and flowers in plant pots. This will be beneficial to the planet and much easier on the eyes than sterile office files.

Get What You Need

"Opie, you haven't finished your milk. We can't put it back in the cow, you know."
~Aunt Bee Taylor, *The Andy Griffith Show*

Taking what you need or making use of what you have is an easy place to begin your journey to contributing to a greener you. How do you see your organization becoming more resourceful with materials and money? How will you continue to evaluate its progress towards being an eco-friendly company that you can feel proud of? Take a small step towards this victory…and then another small step…and then another. Each step is for the generations that follow us. Walk on!

About the Authors

Michelle LaBrosse, MSME, PMP, Founder Cheetah Learning and Cheetah Power

Michelle LaBrosse is an engineer and an entrepreneur with expertise in both aerospace and mechanical engineering. She started her career as an Air Force officer in the field of aircraft structures and vibrations; a challenge that resonates today with some of the technical challenges encountered with wind power.

For her mechanical engineering master's degree thesis project, she participated in a Department of Energy grant to help older factories become more energy self-sufficient.

Michelle has been creating courses using accelerated learning principles for the past 15 years. She is the founder of Cheetah Learning, [1]a firm of over 100 people worldwide that specializes in combining accelerated learning and project management to help people achieve their goals faster than they ever before imagined.

The Project Management Institute recognized Michelle as one of the top 25 most influential women worldwide in Project Management. Her company, Cheetah Learning, was named the 2008 Project Management Institute Provider of the Year in recognition of its accelerated learning in project management education.

Michelle is a graduate of Harvard Business School's Owner President Management Program. She is also the founding board member of the Center for Advanced Learning Concepts (CALCO). She brings all of this experience together to help herself and others become energy self-sufficient.

Erica Edmond, CAPM, Cheetah Green Team

A marketing intern for Cheetah Learning and Cheetah Power, Erica is Cheetah's go-to resource for all things green. She researches and writes the Cheetah Power newsletter and is also a research assistant for a communication professor at the University of Portland.

In 2008, Erica began her first Cheetah internship and wrote an ongoing green feature article for the monthly Cheetah Learning newsletter, as well as educational green articles that showed Cheetah employees how to become more energy efficient in their offices and at home.

During the summer of 2007, Erica worked on a catamaran in Haines, Alaska, as a deckhand/purser. Prior to that, she was appointed by Alaskan senator Ted Stevens to work as a senate page in the U.S. Senate in Washington, D.C.

Born in Soldotna, Alaska, Erica has traveled to Costa Rica through an AFS exchange program to take Spanish language and culture classes. She also attended a summer

session at the Naval Academy in Annapolis.

A senior at the University of Portland, Erica is majoring in organizational communication. When she's not studying or working for Cheetah, she can be found exploring with Rambo, her Chihuahua.

For more information, please visit www.cheetahlearning.com [1].

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