



# Engaging Employees in “Going Green”

## A Guide for Manufacturers

This guide presents 10 proven ways to engage employees in your company’s environmental and social goals. It is based on 30 years of academic and industry research and is designed for HR managers, trainers and employees responsible for health and safety and the environment.

### Why Go Green?

Companies have at least four reasons to improve their impacts on the environment and the community:

1. **Cut Costs.** Replacing lighting fixtures alone can reduce a company’s energy use 25 to 30 per cent.
2. **Increase Revenues.** Customers will pay up to 10 per cent more for products that are green (e.g. made from recycled materials) or ethical (e.g. fair trade).<sup>1</sup>
3. **Find and Keep Great Employees.** Employees look for social responsibility and environmental commitment when selecting employers.<sup>2</sup> Because finding qualified workers is a top priority for Canadian small business owners,<sup>3</sup> being good to people and the planet is no longer just “nice to do.”
4. **It’s Good Business.** Governments, suppliers, customers and employees are talking about the role companies play in the environment and society. Smart business leaders want to be part of that conversation.

### What Success Looks Like: Signs of Engaged Employees

Engaged employees: 1) understand that financial, environmental and social issues are connected; and 2) believe their organization is addressing all three. These are signs employees are engaged in environmental and social goals:

- The HR manager hires people who are committed to customers, employees and the environment.
- Employees are rewarded for reaching environmental targets, such as reducing waste or energy use.
- Employees build the company’s sustainability values into their personal lives – choosing to carpool or bike to work, volunteer in the community, pack lunches from home, etc.
- Salespeople know the environmental and social impacts of the company’s products or services (e.g. their carbon footprint or energy consumption, whether they were produced locally or are fair trade). They use these qualities to distinguish their company’s products or services from competitors’.
- Front-line staff regularly identify ways to reduce energy or water use.
- Staff make business decisions based not just on profit potential but on what is “the right thing to do.”
- Employees engage in community initiatives such as park beautification projects and fundraisers.
- When considering products from new suppliers, purchasing managers automatically screen the products to see if they meet the company’s environmental or ethical criteria.
- The president (or another senior employee) drives industry-wide efforts to improve the environmental or social impact of the entire sector.

<sup>1</sup> Cotte, J. 2009. *Socially conscious consumerism: Executive briefing on the body of knowledge*. Network for Business Sustainability. <<http://nbs.net/knowledge/consumer/consumerism/executive-report-consumerism/>>.

<sup>2</sup> Grolleau, G. 2012. Green not (only) for profit: An empirical examination of the effect of environmental-related standards on employees’ recruitment. *Resource and Energy Economics*, 34; 74-92.

<sup>3</sup> Allies. 2012. *Global talent for SMEs: Building bridges and making connections*. <<http://alliescanada.ca/wp-content/uploads/2010/05/SMEs-Report-English1.pdf>>.

# Ten Ways to Engage Employees in “Going Green”

Jump in! Begin where you can and continue to add activities. More tactics will help you make environmental and social concerns a central part of your workplace and help you find and keep great employees.

Legend: \$ = How much it will cost your company

 = How much of your time it will take

## 1. Be a Role Model

Don't just say it, do it.

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- Be the first to ride your bike to work.
- Sort your lunch waste into garbage, compost and recyclables.

## 2. Start at the Top

Signal the importance of environmental and social commitments by putting senior people in charge of projects.

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- Ensure company-wide environmental committees include senior staff members.
- Assign major projects, like going carbon neutral or environmental auditing, to the most senior operations person.

## 3. Put Your Money Where Your Mouth Is

Allocate time and money to environmental and social initiatives.

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- Give employees company time to participate in volunteer projects.
- Buy energy efficient equipment or lights.
- Buy carbon credits to offset the greenhouse gases your company produces.
- Offer employees flexible work hours or mobile work options.

## 4. Put It into Writing

Policies make your corporate values explicit, clarifying expectations and helping employees make better decisions.

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- Update your corporate values to include social and environmental goals.
- Publish “green” goals on your website.
- Create policies and codes of conduct that support your goals.
- Include “green” successes in your annual report.

## 5. Build Sustainability into Day-To-Day Operations

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- Set thermostats one degree closer to the outside temperature.
- Reduce paper use by printing less.
- Turn off lights and electronics when not in use.
- Conduct life cycle assessments on key products and work with consultants or industry peers to reduce their impacts.

## 6. Make It Someone's Job

Ensure employees are responsible for environmental and social performance.

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- Create a new role dedicated to sustainability or build the duties into an existing position (e.g. in health and safety or human resources).

## 7. Provide Training

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- At new employee orientation, teach employees about the company's environmental goals and why they matter.
- Train employees on issues specific to their jobs, such as waste management, health and safety, and sustainable procurement.

## 8. Explain How It Affects Them

Employees may view environmental or social programs as unwelcome additions to an already-full workload. Explain how the programs relate to their roles.

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- For the financial officers: show the dollar savings you expect to get from investments in energy-efficient equipment.
- For the sales reps: explain how volunteering with a local community group will improve customer loyalty.

## 9. Assemble Champions

Engage employees of varying seniority throughout the company. Programs that are not just “top-down” get more employee buy-in.

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- Find employees who are already passionate about your environmental or social goals and encourage them to build a “Green Team” that reports to you or senior staff.

## 10. Let Employees Experiment

Encourage employees to figure out how they can make a difference and let them try out new ideas.

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- Let them organize zero-waste lunches or toy/food drives, sponsor local sports teams, raise money for disaster relief, serve meals to homeless or at-risk youth, or participate in a fundraising walk.
- Encourage employees to suggest ways of saving energy or reducing waste in their day-to-day work.

## Case Study: Artopex Inc.

**Put It into Writing.** Quebec furniture manufacturer Artopex produced its first sustainability report in 2011. Despite not being required to report publicly, the family-run business felt it was important to share its sustainability vision and progress with customers, suppliers and the community.

**Start at the Top.** Artopex President Daniel Pelletier is an ardent advocate who expresses his commitment to people and the environment at every opportunity: in reports and presentations, and in day-to-day business decisions.

**Make It Someone’s Job.** One employee is dedicated to ensuring the company’s manufacturing operations consistently meet ISO 14001 and 9001 standards (for environmental management and quality, respectively). Sustainable Development Coordinator Jean Barbeau is responsible for the company’s overall sustainability plan, along with a colleague in marketing.

**Provide Training.** Artopex trains all new employees on the company’s sustainability goals and provides a four-hour training session on ISO 14001 adherence. The company is also considering a plan to train all current employees about sustainability. “It will be a major commitment, but we think it’s important for every employee to understand and embrace our sustainability goals,” said Barbeau. Artopex is considering partnering with a third-party organization to deliver the company-wide training.

**Assemble Champions.** Artopex has two committees dedicated to the company’s business and sustainability goals. The four-person pilot committee includes Barbeau, the vice-president, the marketing director and the director in charge of ISO 14001. The 12-person management committee meets every three or four months to discuss goals, new ideas and the sustainability report contents. The committee includes Artopex’s president and representatives from finance, human resources, purchasing, etc. “Having management committee members from across the company ensures sustainability goals are relevant to all areas of the organization,” said Barbeau.

**Let Employees Experiment.** Artopex employees experiment often, finding ways to improve their manufacturing process: “Employees meet in small groups and challenge the way we do things,” said Barbeau. “The focus initially is improving productivity, but their improvements almost always lead to improvements in quality of life as well – for employees and for the end users of our products.”

*For a complete copy of Artopex’s 2010-2011 sustainability report visit [www.artopex.com](http://www.artopex.com).*

### Contributors

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This guide is based on research by the Network for Business Sustainability and management professor Stephanie Bertels. For more resources, visit [www.nbs.net](http://www.nbs.net).