



Engaging Employees in “Going Green”

A Guide for Retailers

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).¹
3. **Find and Keep Great Employees.** Employees look for social responsibility and environmental commitment when selecting employers.² Because finding qualified workers is a top priority for Canadian small business owners,³ 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.

¹ 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/>>.

² 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.

³ 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: Kal Tire

Kal Tire has built environmental and community stewardship into its culture since the company’s founding nearly 60 years ago. Headquartered in Vernon, British Columbia, the family-run company sells and services tires for retail, commercial and mining customers.

Put It into Writing: Following a voluntary environmental assessment in 2005, the company developed a formal corporate strategy dedicated to environmental and social responsibility. The strategy describes the company’s overarching commitments to CSR in statements such as: “We are committed to giving back locally by growing healthy and safe communities for families of our customers and team members.”

Kal Tire’s corporate social responsibility (CSR) strategy also includes specific annual objectives for its core CSR areas: community, the environment and team members. The specific environment targets for 2012 to 2013 are:

1. Mitigate impacts on climate change by reducing energy consumption and carbon footprint.
2. Divert waste from the landfill by increasing recycling rates.
3. Be a leader in tire stewardship and retreading in order to minimize products’ environmental impacts.

Make It Someone’s Job: Kal Tire created a new role responsible for CSR strategy. “This is a first for Kal Tire,” said Corporate Social Responsibility Coordinator Kevin McCarty. “Before creating a full-time CSR coordinator position, Kal Tire was doing a lot of important things for the environment and the community, but they didn’t have any one person dedicated to CSR. Creating a dedicated role is a sign of Kal Tire’s commitment to being a responsible citizen.”

Build Sustainability into Day-to-Day Operations: In addition to making facility improvements, such as replacing traditional lights with energy-efficient ones, Kal Tire has focused on extending the life of its products through tire retreading: buffing off the old tread and applying new tread. The retreading initiative extends tire life, which saves customers money and diverts used tires from landfills.

Kal Tire also plays a leadership role in provincial Tire Stewardship programs, ensuring scrap tires that cannot be retreaded are properly disposed of and recycled into new products when possible. “We don’t just sell a tire and never look back,” said McCarty. “We do a lot to capture that tire and add more value to it.”

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.