



Going Green: Employee and Customer Participation

Your business' environmental initiatives may be initiated with the best of intentions, but you will not realize the benefits unless your staff and customers participate. Sometimes any change from the norm, even if for good reasons, will generate resistance. What is the best way to ensure participation? Here are some tips which will increase the odds of success.

➤ DON'T TRY TO DO IT ALL AT ONCE

You may be overwhelmed with the list of sustainable initiatives presented on this. Remember that being green is a way of doing business – not a race to a finish line. If you are just starting on your business path towards sustainability, begin with small goals to build confidence, knowledge, and a new employee culture. As each new habit is successfully integrated in to your activities, then consider adding a new initiative in to the mix. Trying to do this all at once could be very disruptive to your business.

➤ MAKE IT AN INCLUSIVE PROCESS

By engaging employees or partners in early discussions about your environmental initiatives, it will be easier to get their buy-in. Explain the reasoning behind the introduction of new initiatives. Ask for comments and suggestions. Lay out a plan together. This inclusive process will help to create a sense of ownership and stake in the programs – which will eventually contribute to the achievement of your desired results.

One successful approach is to start a 'green team'. Get together a small group of individuals active in separate elements of the business and brainstorm on achievable goals. Explore priorities and interests to decide on initiatives that are the most doable and most popular among green team members. Have your team meet on a regular basis in order to facilitate setting goals, tracking progress, and celebrating successes. The sense of accomplishment from reaching these goals will generate lots of momentum.

➤ MAKE IT EASY

Many of your green initiatives may require changes in behaviours for your employees and customers. Individuals may not participate out of habit rather than any conscious decision. Thus whatever you can do to remind them, or facilitate the ease of this change, will contribute to success. These actions would be situation-specific, but could include:

- making quick and easy-to-read educational material available and visible for both staff and customers;

- positioning waste management bins (e.g. recycling) in the most convenient places;
- pinning small reminder signs near thermostats or lights to conserve energy;
- making desired products, e.g. real coffee mugs, easily accessible to discourage disposable items;
- inviting customers to participate in sustainability initiatives, e.g. in a hospitality setting through a voluntary sheet and towel exchange (some guests may not require new towels or sheets every day or their stay) to save on water and energy costs;

It is important to understand what actions or processes will change as a result of any given initiative. Sometimes the changes are positive. Sometimes the changes are neutral. Other times the changes may require more work on an individual's behalf. Mitigating the effects this will have on your employee's workflow or your customer's experience will be the key to success.

➤ KEEP TRACK

As with any project, being able to monitor the effects that your environmental initiatives are having is important to help you evaluate if they are having the desired effect, pinpoint where things are going awry, and make educated decisions moving forward.

➤ CELEBRATE YOUR SUCCESSES

Becoming a more environmentally sustainable operation is a substantial marketing opportunity for your business. Do not hesitate to promote this publicly in your community, network, in your advertising, and even through the media as awareness of your work may generate new opportunities and customers for your business. If applicable, making your employees or partners aware of your success – and perhaps rewarding them for it – will reinforce the collective commitment to the programs.

➤ STRIVE FOR CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

Committing to continuous improvement in your business' sustainability practices is a healthy process that will ensure that you are regularly looking for new opportunities to eliminate waste, become more efficient, reduce your impact on the environment, and ultimately save money.

