

# Environmental Awareness

So we all talk about being green and environmentally friendly but do you tell your customers about it?

by Paul Bridle, Leadership Methodologist

This year we set out to find six companies that have an exceptional business to create a series of case studies. Among the many things that I have learnt from those we have done so far, is that each one of them is focused on environmental issues.

In some cases it is an extremely proactive approach, which requires a degree of effort and time. For example, the restaurant chain that is negotiating with its suppliers to provide produce in recyclable packaging and has built the latest restaurant with a water purification unit so that the water used to clean the vegetables is purified and then used to flush the toilets. It is true that these steps have a cost, in the short-term at least.

Others simply have a commitment to using recyclable material and separating their waste so that it can be recycled. In one case, there is a committee of volunteer staff members who look for ways to improve the commitment the company has to recycling and environmental sustainability.

I was impressed in a recent visit to Australia when I was on a train leaving the city. There were a lot of school children on their way home, also on the train. One group of teenagers were eating a takeaway. When they finished, one of the group collected the waste from everyone and when the train stopped at the next station, he ran off the train and threw the waste into a bin and then ran back to the train before the doors closed.

I commented to my friend that this was not typical behaviour that I see of teenagers in other parts of the world. He said that the Australian Government had done a lot of work in educating the public about the need to recycle and keep Australia clean. They had achieved the right behaviour through raising awareness and education.

As leaders our role is to educate people and raise their awareness. Our job is to provide them with the means to behave responsibly. It does not have to be costly and it can reap benefits.

“80% of graduates want a job that has a positive impact on the environment.”

Let us take the business point of view. Businesses want customers, to attract and retain staff, to have engaged staff and to make a profit!

**Customers** - We know that the consumer is keen to deal with organizations that are more environmentally aware.

**Attract and retain staff** - A recent survey showed that 80% of graduates want a job that has a positive impact on the environment, and 92% would choose to work for an environmentally friendly company.<sup>1</sup>

**Engaged Staff** - Increasing environmental awareness and sustainability is an ideal opportunity to engage people, and allow them to influence the business in a practical and safe manner.

**Profit** - I am always amazed at how little things make such a big difference. Simply changing light bulbs, turning items off not in use, etc. can add money directly to the bottom line that is currently being spent. However, people need to be educated and/or engaged in ways of saving money, as opposed to enforcing rules and regulations.

So this month I ask you:

Are you (not your company) committed to do something that has a positive impact on the environment?  
Are you educating your people in what it means to be environmentally aware and the positive impact it can have on them?  
Are you involving your people in seeking ways to improve your impact on the environment?

And finally:

Do you make your customers aware of what you are doing? It is free publicity and may make the difference between them buying from you and buying from your competitor.

Have a great month and take the lead in being more environmentally aware.



**Paul Bridle** has studied effective organizations and the people that lead them for two decades. Paul looks at things from a different perspective and is a big believer in the power of asking challenging questions. His research takes him across the globe which enables him to have a truly global perspective on leadership and the way businesses are moving forward.

<sup>1</sup> Greenbang.,2007. Greenbang [online weblog post]. London. Available from <http://www.greenbang.com/1223/green-jobs-attract-graduates/> [Accessed 2<sup>nd</sup> August 2008].