

8 steps to profitable sustainability

Submitted by: BlueSky Education

Tuesday, 13 September 2016

There are eight ways in which companies can engage employees to foster business sustainability – and in doing so improve profits, according to CB Bhattacharya, the Pietro Ferrero Chair in Sustainability at ESMT Berlin business school.

1. Define the company's long-term purpose

Why does the company do what it does? Leaders should ask this question and share the answers with employees. Thinking about the social purpose that a company serves enables employees to latch onto the higher purpose and use the company as a means to express their values, which in turn, creates meaning in and at work.

2. Spell out the economic case for sustainability

Research has shown that truly sustainable business is profitable business. In 2014 alone, IBM implemented energy conservation projects at 341 locations globally, cutting usage to the tune of \$37.4 million in savings – 6.7% of IBM's total energy use. Leaders should make this case to their management teams.

3. Create sustainable knowledge and competence

This is where training comes in – train employees so that they understand how to do things in a sustainable way. Teach them strategies that lead to sustainable practices.

4. Make every employee a sustainability champion

Leaders should tap into their employee's personal lives and highlight what matters to them. We can create businesses that are sustainable for our children and our children's children – and make a profit while doing so.

5. Co-create sustainable practices with employees

Involve employees in sustainable idea generation – those that contribute to the process will be much more likely to engage with the process than those that feel sustainable practice is being forced on them from the top of the company.

6. Encourage healthy competition among employees

Run competitions for the best sustainable business ideas. Encourage competition by rewarding the best.

7. Make sustainability visible inside and outside the company

Employees will feel a sense of pride and 'buy in' if the efforts they make internally are recognised publicly.

8. Showcase the higher purpose by creating transformational change.

No company can go it alone and beat the tragedy of the commons. We need to learn to collaborate with traditional competitors to solve thorny environmental and social issues.

Bhattacharya says, "We should all aspire to leave our world a better place. For a company, that means having a meaningful and strategic purpose and finding ways to tie that purpose into the values and

day-to-day work of individual employees.

Every person wants his or her working life to have a higher purpose that goes beyond doing a job and earning an income. Yet too many people spend most of their waking hours in workplaces that fall short of providing this. Companies that can resolve the tension people feel between their personal values and the best interests of the business will benefit by having a highly engaged and productive workforce—proud to play a part in bringing positive change to communities around the world.”

ENDS.

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