

Passing Down

By Barbara Wichmann

SUSTAINABILITY

Developing a Green Business Mentorship Program.

While we all share the role of women and men in business, there are other “titles” we have in common, as well. Many of us are also parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, godparents, mentors, and friends. We all interact with children or young people at some point in our professional or personal lives. We see firsthand how the next generation thinks and experiences the world we have worked hard to build.

In our professional spaces, we are aware of the need for sustainability and are passionate about opportunities to pursue it. Now, it's time to look at ways to combine our current efforts with future prospects. Consider developing a mentorship program through your company that invites bright minds to learn the basics of business while gaining insight on the integral role sustainability plays in every department.

Conveying the Notion of Sustainability

Times are changing in new and exciting ways. Green businesses are celebrated and sought after. Sustainability and efficiency are well-known and valued words. Celebrities and big brands are supporting sustainability-driven communication campaigns. Transparency in business is encouraged along with the practices to back them up. There are actually Green MBAs that can be earned to focus entrepreneurial pursuits on sustainability and social issues.

But the momentum must be kept up. A recent study by Pew Research found that only 32 percent of millennials are likely to describe themselves as environmentalists—the last generation's term for the sustainably-minded. This is likely a rejection of the label rather than the actual sentiment, given that they are overall more supportive of stricter environmental laws than their predecessors. However, it is a warning sign of what can happen if we allow our current efforts to become dated, applicable only to us, and not belonging to the visions of future entrepreneurs. Instead, we must be proactive about passing on the green baton.

Mentoring Programs

If your company is one of the proud frontrunners of sustainability in business, then you have the responsibility and opportunity to make sure that these values are passed on to the next generation of leaders. Your company is in a unique place to have a powerful impact on budding businesspeople, ensuring that they are instilled with the importance of sustainability and the ways in which it relates to the day-to-day practices of your industry.

Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) programs everywhere are encouraging young men and women to consider STEM in their careers, oftentimes, in an interdisciplinary and applied manner. I think there are similar opportunities to encourage interns and entry-level businesspeople to pursue these areas of interest in the professional world, and to encourage their passions for environmental sustainability at the same time.

The **National Council for Science and the Environment** (NCSE) has developed a program called **Enviromentors**, which enlists environmental, science, and natural resource professionals, faculty, and college students to become volunteer mentors to high school students. Although this exists primarily in the academic space, it is one model for how to transfer knowledge from experienced professionals to interested up-and-comers.

How can you help our next decision-makers to have an impact? How can they get involved in clean technology for the future?

Key Tips for Developing a Sustainability Mentoring Program

When developing your own sustainability mentoring program, you can integrate all the best of your business acumen (without giving away the recipe to your secret sauce, of course) while instilling how important the role of sustainability is in your operations and mission. Whatever industry you're in, you have already discovered some of the

Sustainability *(continued)*

ways that sustainability impacts your goals and objectives.

•**Spot the Sustainability.** Outline exactly where and how sustainability is addressed in your organization, and who is in charge of promoting and researching ways to improve. You may even find your potential mentors there, who should also be able to outline what sustainability means to your company.

•**Define the Objective.** Work with your business' specific plans and objectives in developing your mentorship program to promote those green aspects in turn.

•**Train Your Mentors.** Explain the importance of these programs and provide your mentors with encouragement and support. Give them the tools to make it a fulfilling and positive experience for them, too.

•**Manage Expectations.** The process of developing a green mentorship program is ongoing, and it's important for everyone know that a lot of the benefits of participation will be seen in the long term.

•**Assist in Structuring.** The scheduling and timing will look different for everyone. Especially in the beginning, help mentor and mentee determine the ideal format for their meetings as well as what will be discussed. Give suggestions on how these sessions can progress, yet leave room for flexibility.

•**Communicate.** Continue to check-in with both parties to ascertain how things are going and to offer input as needed. Ask for their individual evaluations of the process and determine how best to proceed in the next stages.

We can use our position as business leaders to promote the notion of sustainability. Of environmentalism. Of environmentally-friendly business practices. Of being conservationists. Of preserving our natural resources. Beyond the terminology is the very real importance of taking care of our Earth's resources while we still have them. We know the importance of this. Do our young people? How can we help them to learn?

Need help establishing your own mentorship program? Call ARTÉMIA Communications for help highlighting your sustainable practices and conveying them through mentorship. ♦



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