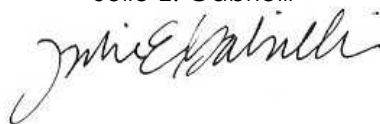


See the Green: 7 Questions to Find Your Green Business Blind Spot



By Green Business Mentor
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Many savvy business owners want to know more about the benefits of applying a green mindset to their organization. Did you know that green businesses have outperformed their traditional counterparts throughout the recent economic downturn by 15%? Not to mention that, since green is so hot right now, green-focused businesses routinely get increased media attention.

Many self-reliant people have started businesses on a shoestring and kept going through long hours and years of dedicated toil. So it's not surprising that they tend to take this approach: "We can start a green program on our own. We don't need 'outside' help."

Build capacity from within . . . and, get help

Yes, it is important to build a strong internal capacity for any structural change within a business. It's never successful or lasting to simply hire an outside gun to come in and tell everyone what to do. It just will not be integrated or authentic to your company.

Growing a green program organically from within is a practical approach. At the same time, it can be very powerful to enlist the right mentorship at the beginning. As Raymond Holliwel observed, "I always advocate that it is better to get a good start, when possible, by getting help, rather than to come over the slower and more arduous path of self-education. Then, the student . . . will be able to make rapid progress."

Avoid overwhelm by knowing where you are going

Many of my clients are already deeply committed to a green path, and have taken action. They come to me feeling overwhelmed, frustrated, wheel-spinning, or lacking broad support in their organization. All of these are symptoms of an uncoordinated green program – lots of small tactics, but lacking a coherent vision that sustains and inspires everyone.

How do you know if you are headed in the right direction? The following seven questions will help you find any blind spots you may have. Your answers will help you diagnose where you are encountering challenges in your greening program and where you may need help in goal-setting, audits and measuring, ongoing accountability, or advanced training.

Workbook Questions

Each question has some guidance or suggestions below it, as well as room for your answers.

1. What are your priorities for your business?

First, jot down what's important to you: for example, you might list increase media exposure or cut expenses. Your list might include hiring new staff, starting a new product line, or simply getting more organized around the office. Come up with at least ten things that are on your mind right now, things that inspire you and/or keep you up at night.

Next, rank these items in order of urgency and importance, with 1 being the highest, 10 the lowest.

Last, put a star next to those items that you see as related to greening. For example, if you said, "cut expenses," or "reduce waste," both of those are enhanced by a green mindset. If you aren't sure, trust your intuition for now. You can always go back and read some articles on GOforChange. (There's a good list at the bottom of the "What We Do" page.)



2. How will embarking on a greening program benefit your organization?

Some benefits to consider: increase media exposure; attract a different type of customer (or, encourage loyalty of valued customers); save money; engage employees who care about the environment; “future-proof” the business; help us do well by doing good; help us meet our priorities (as discovered in question #1).

3. How important is it to know where you are starting from and where you want to go?

Think of a time when you embarked on a change – perhaps an exercise program. Did you weigh and measure yourself first? If not, how did you track your progress and keep motivated? I just did this recently, and, let me tell you – that second measuring session with the trainer at my gym was fantastic feedback! Milestones and celebrations rock!



4. Do you have a “green team?” What are your criteria for selecting them?

Have you selected people based on certain qualities that you know are needed in order for this to be a successful movement in your company? Or, simply because they are enthusiastic about green?

Make two lists. One is your list of how people are selected now. The other is your list of ideal qualities. (If they are the same, you are in great shape!)

5. Do people on your green team need training in sustainability principles or guidance on effective tactics?

Most workplaces have a great diversity of people. They may differ in their values, their approach to change and problem-solving, their ways of expressing themselves. Greening is no exception. Since everyone starts from a different place, a shared language really helps to get people on the same page. Basic sustainability principles help to create that shared language. This saves a tremendous amount of time, and it also acts as a filter for the overwhelming amount of green information out there.

Do you have a way to foster this common ground?



6. Will people need ongoing leadership and accountability?

As you embark on a strategic, organized greening program, how will you establish milestones and check-ins? When challenges or roadblocks occur, how will your green team (and/or you) approach troubleshooting? Will you remember to celebrate your successes? What about regularly letting your clients and customers in on your successes?

7. Look into the future.

Imagine if, at the end of 6 months, you've designed and embarked on a strategic greening program, what would that be like for your organization? How might that impact your reach, your finances, and your creativity?

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Julie E. Gabrielli is an award-winning architect who was instrumental in starting the sustainable design movement in Baltimore over ten years ago. She has worked with many clients to help them realize their dreams, from concept to construction. As an advisor to the 2007 Solar Decathlon, she helped steer team LEAFHouse to be the top-placing American team, a second-place-overall finish.

Julie sees dismal environmental statistics as a challenge. Surely, with intelligence, creativity, and collaboration, we can do better. She frequently shares her upbeat message on her blog, GOforChange.com, and as an inspiring public speaker.

Julie's expertise is as an industry-changer. She has worked with businesses institutions to develop sustainability initiatives and Climate Action Plans. She now works with small business owners to take their business in a green direction, starting with clear framework and vision, identifying new markets, crafting a green brand and message, developing new products, assessing and reducing their footprint, and giving back.

Her years of competitive sailboat racing taught Julie that when good design is combined with clear vision, steering for changing conditions, and a healthy respect for the forces of nature, great results are possible!

