

## OF TREES, WHALES & PRACTICALITY

One of the hot items on the public agenda these days is "The Environment." Suddenly everyone wants to save the whales and the rain forests. Politicians, rock stars, and big business have all discovered that you can't get anything but good press for saying that you're in favor of trees and marine mammals.

Unfortunately, like the environment itself, the business of living in it responsibly is a complicated one. There are no clear

right or wrong answers, and almost everything one does is apt to have some negative as well as positive effects.

And business people, as usual, are stuck in the middle. We get labeled among the chief villains. (Shame on us for all the toxic waste and poison smoke and industrial waste in the air!) We're supposed to

clean up our acts, abide by all the clean air legislation, fight rising costs, invest for the future, and at the same time, remain competitive.

It's enough to make a person want to sell out and run away to some quiet, unspoiled desert island where they never heard of pollution. Unfortunately, there are no such places left any more.

But despair is not the answer. Neither is paralysis. There are things businesses of any size can do to make a difference—things that don't have to cost a lot of money or disrupt work schedules.

Below are a few suggestions — all of which are relatively inexpensive, quick, and easy to implement. Not every one will work for every office or plant. The list is certainly not complete. I've included them here just to start the ball rolling. This is the direction we need to be walking in. Along with the larger solutions of legislation, funding, and international cooperation, these are the things businesses might do to make a difference in the environment.

- Investigate the possibility of bundling up your waste paper and selling it to recyclers.
- Reuse the boxes and packing material that come to your office.
- Investigate the company pop machine. If it's dispensing aluminum cans, have you made it easy for your employees to recycle the empties? If it's using paper cups, maybe a switch to recyclable cans is the answer.
- Examine your letterhead. Next time you reorder, discuss recycled paper with your supplier. Many paper companies now have some attractive lines of competitively priced, recycled business papers for all uses.

- Examine your operation to see how many disposables you're using just because it's "convenient".
- Cut down on styrofoam or disposable cups for the coffee machine. Encourage employees to bring their own mugs from home.
- Check out the use of disposables in the lunch room. Is it possible to use reusable dishes, trays, silverware?
- Use all the supplies you buy. Make sure things are properly stored, closed, or put away so they are not damaged.
- Make sure the residue from toxic materials is disposed of promptly and safely. The law requires this anyway, and the faster and more efficiently you do so, the smaller the chance of pollution.
- Watch the copier, the fax machine, and the computer printer. How many of those copies are absolutely necessary?
- Check the lights and the thermostat. Are unnecessary lights burning? Does the building *have* to be at a constant 68°? Are you lucky enough to have a facility where the windows open? Do you ever open them when the weather's warm instead of automatically turning on the a.c.?
- Work smarter. Careful work eliminates

errors and, therefore, waste. Jobs that don't have to be done over save time, money, and natural resources.

- Look around your grounds. Who maintains the lawn? What kind of fertilizers and pest control methods do they use? How much watering is done? Is it all necessary?
- Plant trees. Trees make your grounds more attractive. They're good for the environment. Planted close to your building, they create shade and cut down on your cooling bills.
- Watch water consumption. How often is the water left running between operations or during clean-up just because it's easier than turning it off?
- Make sure the cleaners and solvents around your operation are biodegradable. Can those that are be substituted for those that aren't?

Okay, so none of these ideas is terribly original. None will, by itself, save a single whale or an acre of the rain forest. But the journey of a thousand miles does begin with a single step. If we all did what we could about the small, controllable aspects of our environments, the cumulative effects would be startling.

The environment is everybody's home and everybody's business. And none of us is powerless to control what happens in our own backyard.

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Chinese Proverb