

Is sustainability baked into your strategy?

 By Sue Morris

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[Larry Fink](#), the CEO of BlackRock, one of the world's largest investors, said, "The pursuit of profit maximisation at any cost has come at a great cost to the planet and our humanity. Today's culture of quarterly earnings hysteria is totally contrary to the long-term approach we need."

Elon Musk in his [Master Plan, Part Deux](#), said, "[Sustainability] is not some silly, hippy thing - it matters for everyone. By definition, we must at some point achieve a sustainable energy economy or we will run out of fossil fuels to burn and civilisation will collapse."

Wake-up call for conscious capitalism

Doing more with less and doing "good" is radically transforming businesses processes around the globe. In a decade from now, this trend will hit all businesses, even businesses in developing economies, head on. As connected consumers start demanding transparency and fairness from the brands they engage with, the bar will be raised. Opportunities will open for brands who aspire to conscious capitalism.

Every manager, no matter the industry, needs to be thinking and planning now for a business landscape where equal weighting will be given to financial goals, social impact and environmental obligations. Not only will doing this now help you to identify the real issues in your industry that your consumers, employees and shareholders care about, it will also make you feel a whole lot better about the impact of the work you do every day. You can look across the whole value chain for opportunities to do better: sourcing sustainable materials; minimising waste; recycling and generally improving efficiency.

Businesses setting a great example

When we think of environmentally damaging businesses, we don't often think about the clothing we wear; however, the carbon footprint of the apparel industry is vast. Toxic dyes, pesticides, the use of huge amounts of natural resources in manufacturing and shipping and the waste of discarded clothes from the fast fashion trend all contribute. [Eileen Fisher](#) is a hugely successful label that is already using 84% organic cotton, 68% organic linen and is reducing water use and carbon emissions and working to make its supply chain sustainable by 2020.



Image source: www.eileenfisher.com

The food division of outdoor clothing company [Patagonia](https://www.patagonia.com) has recently launched its first sustainable beer, called Long Root Ale. Its brewed using Kernza, a more ecologically viable species of wheatgrass that preserves topsoil, uses less water than wheat, removes more carbon from the atmosphere and apparently makes a damn good beer. It is brewed at Hopworks Urban Brewery, the first brewery to be certified Salmon-Safe in disposing of waste water in a way that doesn't harm native salmon.



[Patagonia's Long Root Ale](https://www.patagonia.com/beer/)

The town of Kamikatsu in Southern Japan took on an ambitious [zero-waste policy](https://www.kamikatsu.com/) in 2003 which includes a drastic recycling

plan which counts 34 different categories of waste. The move has not only been a great ecological success, they have cut waste disposal costs by a third. One of their most imaginative initiatives was to build what is dubbed as the world's most environmentally friendly bar - a pub using only materials from the city's recycling programme. The wooden interior gives it a Skandi feel, combined with a recycled bottle chandelier and wallpaper made of old newspapers. One of the exterior facades is a patchwork of windows, found in abandoned houses in the village. The bar received the Wan Award for Sustainable Buildings in 2016.

Harvard Business School has a great case study about Trader Joe's. In 2015, the founder, Doug Rauch opened a non-profit grocery store, [Daily Table](#), that works with suppliers who donate or offer special buying opportunities for their excess food. The food is sold at almost half the price, allowing lower income families to eat well, even on a small budget. The store is thriving and Rauch hopes that it will be the first of many to come.



Image source: www.dailytable.org

These are just some of the stories of businesses who understand that sustainability is more than just a CSI initiative or a document for the annual report. It doesn't require a strategy consulting firm to get you there. All you need is common sense, compassion and the will to get something good done.

ABOUT SUE MORRIS

Sue works with teams to improve business performance by shaping compelling visions, articulating clear purpose and values, strengthening leadership and building effective engagement programmes. She believes that without these, there will always be a gap between strategic intent and execution.

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