

“GOING GREEN” What does Green mean in today’s business?

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In my effort to convince business decision makers to change their views about what it means to “Go Green”; I have been presented some powerful arguments against making the change. It has been even more difficult to avoid getting caught up in the political controversy surrounding the issue. Over most of the last 15 years I have maintained a commitment to “green” business and helping others do the same. In this article I will state and address the most common arguments that I have encountered.

1st Argument: The problem is overblown and it’s an attempt by “tree huggers” to impose their radical agenda on everyone else.

I heard this argument quite often 10 to 15 years ago. This usually represented the first response to any suggestion of changing to “Green” business solutions. I call this type of argument the “No Need Argument”. In essence they are saying why make a change if there isn’t a need. I am happy to say that most people now acknowledge the magnitude and severity of the environmental problems. For some, there still is probably a lingering suspicion that it is special interest political manipulation. However, the overwhelming current scientific evidence has convinced most not only of the problem’s authenticity, but more importantly its validity. This has only come about by a continuous stream of information concerning climate change and the impact that the Industrial Revolution and Age has made on the entire planet. There has been a

significant shift in general awareness as to environmental problem identification, but simple awareness is not enough. It represents awareness only and doesn’t represent a clear direction to action.

2nd Argument: My impact is too insignificant to make a difference.

This is an argument of perspective. With the growing global awareness of the scope of the environmental problems that are present, it makes individual impact seemingly insignificant. I call this the “I Can’t Make Difference, So Why Try Argument”. This is akin to “I can’t see the trees for the forest”. In other words, the problem is so big that any one single individual or organization can’t have a significant impact on correcting the situation. This is a valid argument in one sense; in as much, as it is impossible, do to the magnitude of the problem, for any one individual or organization to wholly rectify the problem. However, the counter argument goes something like this; although one individual or organization can’t do it on their own, as more and more individuals and organizations join into the effort of “Going Green”, each doing their small part will eventually contribute to reversal of the problem. Before environmental remediation can occur, the contributing practices and processes must first be changed. In general, environmental impact is supported on three legs: 1. Production; 2. Consumption; and 3. Waste Management. If any of the three are disproportionate to the others, it creates conditions that result in an overall unbalance. Since they represent a system, changes in one represent changes in the other two for good or ill.

3rd Argument: "Going Green" requires too much change in my current operation.

I call this the "All or Nothing Argument". This may in fact be a true argument if one were to go completely green in a single step. However, this is a misconception of what is meant by "Going Green". "Going Green" is a process of change not just an end goal. Few could ever afford to "Go Green" in a single step. It makes more sense to draft a transition plan that achieves the goal over time and in smaller incremental steps. A good example to look at is what has happened in residential lighting. Not so many years ago most homeowners used incandescent lighting to illuminate their homes. Over the course of just 15 years a vast number of people have now converted and are using compact fluorescents. This simple and inexpensive step has saved millions of kilowatts. In the process of "Going Green" analyzing one's operation can result in finding small things that can be done that will begin the "Going Green" process. The simplest actions are changing things such as lubricants, lighting and/or adjusting employee production hours. As capital equipment begins to be repaired and replaced, green repairs are possible and replacement with green machines is also a good choice. In this way expense is spread over a longer period and has less of a dramatic impact on the bottom line. The more that go Green, the greater the impact will be and the economy of scale will begin to reduce the cost of "Green Products", just as in the case of the compact fluorescents.

4th Argument: I don't know what to do because there are conflicting regulations and requirements. I

will just wait until the government imposes regulations that require me to do it.

I call this the "The Regulations Are Too Confusing, So I'll Wait Argument". This is a tough argument to counter. I would be less than honest if I didn't state that I too see regulations and requirements as confusing and in some cases counter productive. This argument against making a change now is only valid if regulations and requirements are viewed as unmanageable. This is simply not the case. If one looks at the history of environmental regulation and requirements, there is a consistent pattern of legislation and enforcement. There are two problems; what are the regulations and who has enforcement responsibility. Regulation and enforcement can come from an international level, federal level, state or province, and local level. The patchwork nature of the environmental policy and regulation has come about from a lack of a clear political direction. One must remember that this entire process is less than four decades old. Significant change takes time and it is still very much in process. To end the seemingly endless requirements it will probably require taking advantage of information resources now available. It is always wise to begin with the local authorities and work your way up. Usually the local regulations will be the most meaningful. Also there are a wide variety of specific industry resources that can and are more than willing to assist.

As you can see I didn't even attempt to use ethical arguments as a counter argument, since these individuals normally don't respond very well to ethical arguments.

There are some individuals who will not change until the change is mandated.

The longer it takes to draft and implement the mandates the longer they can put off the change. We have seen this used for over a century when a change is needed to improve working conditions. However, what is usually behind the resistance is how the change will affect the bottom line. The counter argument must involve the impact to the bottom line. Although, initially "Going Green" may have increased financial exposure, over time it will have other positive benefits that will reflect on the bottom line. One good example is in the case of using fire resistant hydraulic fluids over petroleum based oils. Of course initially the fire resistant fluid may cost 20% to 30% more, but there are other benefits to be gained. If a fire were to occur, then the hydraulic fluid would not become a fuel source; thus, reducing possible damage to structure and equipment. Also, because most fire resistant hydraulic fluids are water based, then cleaning up of spills and leaks is much easier since it can just be washed down with soap and water; thus, cutting the cost of cleanup and disposal. Fire resistant fluids usually don't require hazardous storage; thus, eliminating the need for intrinsically safe rooms and cabinets. Most fire resistant fluids are considered to be non-toxic and do not require the use of special handling and the use of protective equipment for personnel. Finally, when equipment is properly maintained, fire resistant fluids actually extend the life of the equipment; resulting in lower costs over the life of the equipment.

In addition, the longer one waits to begin changing the bigger the problem grows and when regulations are finally put into force the more it will cost at that time. The old adage is "pay now or pay later, but you're still going to have to pay" is quite relevant.

5th Argument: I don't have to worry about it because someone will come up with new technology to alleviate the problem.

I agree that it will take advances in technological solutions to eventually return the planet to more pristine conditions. But how long will it take to find the technological answers; and if we delay changing until then, how much bigger will the problem be? Because of new technologies over the last 200 years, we are in the position we are in now. Some estimate that it will take at least as long to get out of the problem as it did to get into it. If this is in fact the case, then even with the advent of new technological solutions it will be minimally 8 to 10 generations before the problem is fully resolved. By delaying the change to "Going Green" it is simply extending the time it will take to remediate the damage that has been done and will be done. If, under the most optimistic conditions, it takes 8 to 10 generations; would you find it acceptable to extend that out to 10 to 20 generations, even if conditions would allow humanity to survive that long? A failure to implement now only makes the problem grow larger and the requirement to the challenge greater for our descendents. It is not the case that we don't know the consequences of not "Going Green". How much are we going to allow the planet to degrade before we decide enough is enough; we don't have the option of picking up and moving someplace else since it involves the whole planet. History will not be as kind to us as it has been to those of the Industrial Revolution and Age since they were unaware of their long term impact; whereas we are. By waiting for the "magic bullet" we may be running the risk of reaching a tipping point where a

reversal cannot occur even with the most advanced technology.

6th Argument: I can't see that the benefit of "Going Green" justifies the cost.

Each industry and operation is different. Some will see an immediate benefit while others will see the benefit over a longer period of time. One must look to not only the immediate benefits but also what the long term gains will be, and some of those are not directly related to the bottom line. There may be less waste to dispose of, better working conditions, better equipment lifetimes, less regulation to deal with, and my favorite is new marketing opportunities. I have worked with a number of firms that have decided that "Going Green" provided new opportunities to separate themselves and their products from their competition. Because of the increased public awareness of "Going Green" these firms were able to turn it to their competitive advantage. They were able to gain positive awareness which directly translated into increased sales. I have seen instances where firms changed to fire resistant lubricants that reduced their casualty insurance premiums. When deciding whether to go Green or not should involve an extensive cost benefit analysis. I know that if there isn't that kind of expertise on staff that there are good consultants available to perform the analysis.

Final Counter Argument:

"Going Green" is an investment in the future. The continued survival of our species and all other life on this planet is dependent on what we do today. It is not enough to simply maintain the status quo but we need to reverse the damage of the past and present. By

each of us becoming personally responsible we increase the odds that there is hope for the future. Each of us who decide to "Go Green" stops being part of the problem and truly becomes part of the solution.

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