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A Brighter Future for Everyone Depends on Corporate Sustainability

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The concept of corporate sustainability first emerged in the [mid-twentieth century](#), slowly but steadily gaining a foothold over the following decades. Now, as the world reaches new heights of complexity, we find ourselves at an unprecedented intersection of business practices, societal change, and environmental consciousness. This rising sentiment makes one thing abundantly clear: Prioritizing sustainable efforts will increase value for both the consumer and incoming talent.

As we look toward a post-pandemic future, we can expect to see more global corporations, investors, and business leaders intensifying their sustainability efforts to reduce their carbon footprint and promote greater sustainability in meaningful and measurable ways. The brave, new world of remote work forced upon us in 2020 gives us something of a blueprint to do just that—in April of that year, the U.S. experienced a [25.5 percent reduction](#) in the emission of nitrogen dioxide, a key indicator of global economic activities, among other benefits.

So how do we move beyond circumstantial change and make sustainability a permanent fixture? Are today's business leaders capable of taking care of their financials and the planet at the same time? Let's examine the external forces that are helping to move the sustainability needle as well as some companies that are setting great examples for the current market.

Sustainably Savvy Consumers

Today's consumers put in the time and effort to educate themselves. With climate change becoming a clear and present danger, companies are facing increasing consumer pressure to become sustainable.

One might think the financial insecurity brought on by the pandemic would lead many to put aside ethical and environmental concerns when making purchases, but the opposite is true. [A recent report by the BBC states that](#), according to Accenture, "...consumers 'have dramatically evolved,' and that 60% were reporting making more environmentally friendly, sustainable, or ethical purchases since the start of the pandemic." Not only that, but consumers are actively paying more to align themselves with sustainable brands they trust. In a [pre-pandemic survey](#) of 6,000 people across 11 countries, more than half said they would pay more for products designed to be reused or recycled.

Much of this change in sentiment can be traced to younger generations, who are maturing and accruing purchasing power of their own. Additionally, consumers of all ages are taking this prolonged period of instability and socio-political unrest to assess their values. As [Fortune](#)

reports, many people are seeking a middle ground between the Amazon-level convenience of the modern age and voting with their dollars “to support environmental, labor, or social justice practices.”

Talent That Cares

Employees no longer work only for their checks; they factor a company’s mission and culture into their job searches. Private companies that once focused only on the bottom line now need to [pursue the UN’s sustainability goals](#) diligently if they want to bring in talent. In fact, some 51% of employees say they won’t work for a company that doesn’t have strong environmental or social commitments. And if you zoom in on Millennials, a considerable 96% expect their employers to take steps towards becoming more sustainable.

By promoting sustainability in your company, potential employees will be all the more motivated to work for you and share in the organization’s stellar reputation. If you want to appeal to modern recruits, it is time for your company to lead the way towards sustainability. Doing so will attract a wider base of employees, many of whom care more and more about working at a company that [appears to share their values](#).

Much has been written about the [work-life blur](#) that was exacerbated by the pandemic. The same overlap that blurs the line between personal and professional life is also changing how workers view their companies. Today’s employees want businesses to [commit to efforts](#) alongside society and individuals, championing the beliefs that they themselves hold. For instance, many employees recognize and believe the new, more sustainable work-from-home paradigm brought on by COVID should remain in place. These same employees, when asked to return to work, are not willing to [compromise their beliefs](#). It turns out to be a sound belief, as [establishing hybrid workplaces](#) has real implications for minimizing carbon footprints.

Once you get employees in the door, involve them in sustainability initiatives. Active employee participation in sustainability issues does more than improve environmental, social, and governance performance—it can also help lure burned-out professionals [back to the job](#), including those who have lost their motivation and are contemplating quitting, if they haven’t already.

In Good Company

We now understand the consumer- and talent-based trends shifting the corporate world toward a more sustainable future. So who’s doing it best? As it turns out, some of the best

examples of corporate sustainability are well-established titans in their respective fields.

Take Johnson & Johnson and Unilever, [for instance](#). The former “has a decades-long track record of manufacturing environmentally responsible personal care products” and has invested in a fleet of hybrid vehicles to cut down on emissions. The latter company has dedicated itself to “achieving zero net deforestation,” which means that “for every acre of forest cleared, equal acreage must be replanted.” To back up this lofty goal, Unilever uses palm oil sourced from only sustainable sources.

Other consumer companies have become recognized champions of sustainability as well. [Campbell's](#) was named one of the 100 Best Corporate Citizens in 2020 by *Corporate Responsibility Magazine* and is currently on track to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions. Potato giant [Lamb Weston](#) has pledged to reduce its use of nitrogen, water, and active-ingredient pesticide by 5% by 2030, which is an ambitious, impactful goal considering the company's sheer size. And finally, [Mondelēz International](#) has set forth numerous sustainability-focused benchmarks to hit by 2025; the well-known snack producer has already reduced its carbon emissions and water usage by 20% and 30%, respectively.

Keeping the Focus on Sustainability

The main takeaway from all of this is that leading with purpose can positively impact both the planet and your business's financials—neither goal has to suffer or [take precedence over the other](#). In this new corporate climate, shaped in part by pandemic-era tumult, committing to sustainability puts your company's values at the forefront, which can attract employees and job seekers who share those values. To put it another way: People, profit, and the planet can all mutually benefit by retraining our focus on what matters most.