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Pearls of Wisdom

Extracted from 'The Green Executive'

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“If you are coming at business from a green or ethical orientation, then you had better over-compensate on the commercial side. In my first business we recruited people who were passionate about the ethical agenda but were less interested in commerce. Now we do it the other way around – we recruit people who are strong commercially and then school them in our company culture.”

Vic Morgan, co-founder and Chief Innovation Officer, Ethical Superstore

“While you should stretch your brand to include greener products, don’t diversify too far.

Seeing is believing - if you want to bring people on board, show them how it works in practice.

Finally, devolve responsibility, get everyone involved.”

Richard Gillies, Director of CSR, Plan A and Sustainable Business, Marks & Spencer

“You have to be a bit of a maverick to make things happen. Be stubborn and bloody-minded. It can be daunting when you start but you have to do one thing at a time, do it properly, and move on to the next. We found it very useful to get an external set of eyes to come in and do an audit. And of course, you shouldn’t be afraid to make mistakes.”

Glen Bennett, Managing Director, EAE Distribution Ltd

“I don’t have a team of people and that is deliberate. We don’t want anybody to think that this is someone else’s job. We want to empower everyone to do their job in a greener way, rather than tell them what to do. They’re the experts in what they do, we just suggest how things could work and encourage them to move in that direction.

We give people permission to act, give them confidence to move forward and allow them to fail until they get it right. You have to have the humility to accept that other people know more than you.”

Paula Widdowson, Director of Corporate Social Responsibility, Northern Foods

“Get the right staff and get the right balance between in house staff and contracted staff. If you contract everything out, you lose ownership of the situation. We have a small staff of core skills and bring in the specialists as and when we need them. You should always plan for succession – I try to bring someone younger along with me so when I move on there is someone to take my place.”

Stephen Little, Director of Building Services, The Sage Gateshead

“The rules of green business are just the same as any other business - you need a scalable business model in an expanding market. You either have to be able to do it quicker, smarter or better than everyone else or own some intellectual property.

You have to have a passion for what you do and believe in what you are doing. The single most important quality for anyone in this game is perseverance.”

Roy Stanley, Chairman, Tanfield Group

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“Learn by doing.

Get passionate people in, get started and gain competence as you go along.”

Toon Bossuyt, Managing Director, BOSS Paints

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“Focus on what is good for the business – identify what are the minimum things you must do and then what are the things that will have biggest benefits for the organisation.”

Surrie Everett-Pascoe, Environmental and Product Safety Director, Canon Europe

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“Create a team of people who are interested and engage with the top people to get commitment and buy in.

Make it fun, but communicate business benefits.”

Julie Parr, Director of Service Excellence, Muckle LLP

“Give responsibility for sustainability to someone with a real passion for it, otherwise it will just disappear into a spreadsheet.”

Sally Hancox, Director, Gentoo Green, Gentoo Housing Group

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