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The Low Carbon Agenda

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It's Hotting Up!

And I'm not just talking about the weather. Our political leaders have been busy - Barack Obama got his climate change bill through congress (just), the UK Govt launched no less than four low carbon strategies in one day (see News below) and the G8 made some progress ahead of the big COP15 meeting in Copenhagen in December to agree a post-Kyoto agreement.

These politicians are finally showing leadership where before it was lacking - and we're seeing the results. If you want to get ready for the resulting low carbon economy it is time for you to demonstrate some leadership too - the topic of this month's issue.



All the very best,

Gareth

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PS: Can you do me a favour? Please forward this edition to at least one other person who you think would find it of value.

Leadership

A veritable rainforest's worth of business school publications has been produced over the years on the topic of leadership, so it is impossible to give a micro-lesson here. However there seems to be a general consensus that you can manage by authority, but you can only lead by influence. To have influence you need to be consistent, set a great example and not be deflected by minor obstacles.

When I asked a group of 10 environmental managers at a recent seminar for examples of good leadership all I got was a table of red faces. But there are some examples of strong environmental leadership - Terry Leahy, CEO of Tesco said last year "People's values do not change simply because the economy is going through a bumpy patch." Marks & Spencer's are currently running an advertising campaign deriding their competitors for getting cold feet on green issues as soon as the economic going got tough.

Being A Paragon

One of the fatal flaws of leadership is saying one thing and doing another. I have heard repeated anecdotes of Managing Directors announcing a new low carbon direction for the business, then showing up the next day in a brand new gas guzzling company car. They then wonder that their staff get cynical.

The owners of Google famously drive modest and efficient Prius hybrids despite their immense wealth - a clear demonstration of their commitment to tackling climate change. They are also funding a range of low carbon R&D projects. UK Conservative leader David Cameron famously cycled to the House of Commons to demonstrate the new eco-friendly direction he wanted to take his party. OK, he was followed by a SUV carrying his change of clothes and papers which negated any environmental benefit, but in terms of making a statement it was extraordinarily effective.

Consistency is important - you have to demonstrate you're in this for the long run and not just pursuing a fad - see the M&S example above. On the other hand, occasionally leadership means

taking difficult decisions and you may not always be able to take the greenest option. The best thing to do is 'fess up - be clear about why the decision was made and staff and customers will usually give you a good hearing. Trying to greenwash your way through at this point will do more harm than good.

Making a (Real) Commitment

Anybody can say "we commit to making our processes zero waste/carbon neutral/whatever", but that's just an aspiration until it is backed up with budget, resources and attention.

"What's your budget?" is my killer question for senior management as the answer usually is "We don't have one." Let's face it:

no budget = no commitment.

M&S put £200m in their Plan A sustainability programme. OK, so they've got all that back and more in cost savings, but they put their money where their mouth was up front. So get your wallet/spreadsheet out and make a real commitment.

(BTW In a couple of month's time we'll be looking at different ways to finance low carbon projects.)

Leading Staff

Rewarding your staff for good behaviour and admonishing them for poor behaviour is another aspect of leadership. As we saw back in [edition 14](#), staff incentives can be tricky to get right, but giving kudos can be as an incentive for low carbon behaviour ("Green Employee of the Month"?) can be as powerful as any economic benefit. Giving your staff some freedom (and even some delegated budget, wow!) to develop low carbon solutions is an excellent way to show leadership.

Just as important is to instil discipline in your staff to avoid poor environmental performance. You may have to face down members of your management team to make things happen. Middle management is one area where putting new responsibilities on individuals who are already straining under all their other duties can result in obstinacy or even a backlash. We're currently running workshops for management teams to build sufficient capacity and understanding to bring people on board. We find that by engaging people in solutions, we can overcome these problems by generating genuine interest in the subject.

Next Month

So what if you're not in a leadership role and your boss doesn't care? Next month we'll look at what you can do in your organisation if you face a leadership vacuum when it comes to low carbon issues.

Low Carbon News

The UK Government has launched a whole raft of low carbon strategies this month. For a digestible summary, [click here](#).

At the G8 conference, the 'historic polluters' and some of the big emerging economies agreed that they would take action to limit climate change to 2C, but couldn't agree a 2020 emissions reduction target. We'll have to wait for Copenhagen for that (although no international agreement or lack of it should prevent any nation taking action independently).

General Motors (creators of the Hummer) were overtaken by Toyota (creators of the Prius) as the largest car manufacturer in the world in 2008 and then promptly filed for bankruptcy. Well they're back, Hummer-free, promising to promote the electric Volt model and, even, apparently considered re-colouring their famous blue logo green (although cynics may suggest that this was a neat piece of spin). A lesson for us all.

Tip of the Month

Buy/serve local, organic and seasonal food at your catering outlets and events. While there are some exceptions, these will normally have a much lower carbon footprint than imported food. If you really must serve bottled water, get some from a local source.

The small print:

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