

Thought Leadership Sustainability



If you want to get serious about sustainability, you have to talk about one of the most important topics in the business world—execution.

In his best-selling book on the subject, former Honeywell Chairman Larry Bossidy defined execution as “the discipline of getting things done.” I think of it another way: Execution is the ability to engineer success.

No matter which description you prefer, it’s clear that execution is bubbling to the surface in more and more conversations about sustainability. That fact was confirmed by a landmark survey of CEOs conducted by Accenture and the United Nations Global Compact.

“CEOs believe that execution is now the real challenge to bringing about the new era of sustainability,” said the authors of the official survey report, which was published in June 2010.

So how do we meet this challenge? How do we make our vitally important green ideas work well in the business world? I’ll provide my thoughts on the subject in a series of three e-newsletters on the execution theme.

First things first: Pick the right project.

When I think about the long history of our sustainability programs at Xerox, one thought jumps out right away. Execution excellence begins with a disciplined approach to project selection.

In fact, that’s number one on my hit list of Execution Essentials.

There are a lot of reasons why this is so important. You need a project designed to produce results for your business and the environment. That’s a basic requirement. You also want to get the biggest possible return for your investment. And last but not least, you want to make sure that you can get to the finish line in a reasonable period of time with the resources that will be made available to you.

In other words, the project selection process calls for the same kind of level-headed pragmatism and analysis you would use to make any other strategic business decision.

Now for the how-to.

If you want to pick the right project for your company, here’s my advice. Don’t narrow the field before you start. Instead, look throughout your entire value chain—from your suppliers to your customers—for opportunities to really make an impact. Then analyze them.

What project will deliver the biggest return in terms of business benefits AND sustainability? How much will you need to invest to achieve the goal? Can you line



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up the required resources? Can you measure the outcome?

It's also important to consider the often overlooked impact of green programs on brand equity, goodwill, the ability to attract and retain the best and brightest, your access to markets, the popularity of your products and services with customers, and the hidden costs of compliance.

When you carefully consider all these issues, you'll be able to prioritize potential projects and recommend the best option to your senior management team. Then you'll be ready to move on to the next Execution Essential: Getting the senior-level support you need to succeed.

For more on that topic, tune in to my next e-newsletter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Patricia A. Calkins".

Patty Calkins