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Thought Leadership Sustainability



In my last e-newsletter, I focused on the all-important up-front work that sets the stage for success with any sustainability effort—picking the right project.

Now let's talk about another Execution Essential: getting support and active sponsorship from your senior leadership team.

Wanted: a senior-level champion.

As any corporate veteran knows, you can't make headway with a major transformation unless you have active support from above. And that means more than project approval. You need to have a senior leader on your team.

A high-level champion or sponsor will help you open doors, make the right connections and line up the required resources. Your champion will also provide an official stamp of approval for your initiative.

To steal a line from MasterCard, that kind of endorsement is priceless, because it will make it much easier to get assistance from employers, suppliers and anyone else you need to involve.

Make your best business case.

So how do you win over your senior leaders? The fact that you represent a good cause isn't enough. You have to earn their support by presenting a compelling business case. And that's where all the due diligence work that went into picking the right project pays off.

You've explored your value chain ... identified your biggest opportunities ... and analyzed the potential risks, rewards and resource requirements. So now you can explain exactly how your project will produce measurable improvements in a reasonable time frame.

But there's still one more thing you have to do to get high-level support. You need to prove that your project will produce an impressive return on investment—a positive ROI.

That's ultimately the deciding factor in getting the green light for your project and finding a champion. But here's the problem. Some sustainability teams fail to include some very important information when they talk about ROI. Let me explain.

Calculate the real ROI.

Almost by definition, a sustainability program should pay off in two ways. It should lower your impact on the environment. And it should help you improve efficiency by conserving energy, reducing waste and optimizing your operations.



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But effective green programs can also improve your brand image and make your products and services more popular with your customers. Which will help you generate more revenue. They can also reduce the costs of regulatory compliance and mitigate future risks.

Think about the cost of energy, raw materials, water and other resources. They are only going to go up in the years ahead. And think about the potential for increasing regulation, noncompliance penalties and lawsuits. An effective approach to sustainability can help you bring those risks under control.

All of these factors play a role in your organization's financial performance. So make sure you include them in your analysis of the true, long-term ROI for your project. Then you'll be in a better position to get the approvals and executive sponsorship you need to move on to the most exciting phase of execution—implementation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Patricia A. Calkins". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Patty Calkins

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