

How to Be an Embracer



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A recent study published in the MIT Sloan Management Review, which discusses global business trends and strategies, finds that more and more major companies are becoming what are termed 'embracers'. They are embracing the concept of sustainability and believe it will become 'a source of advantage' in their future businesses growth and profitability.

The study found that some of these embracers are also the most successful companies worldwide. Mentioned at the top of the embracer list are such well-known global firms as General Electric, Toyota, IBM, and Walmart. These companies not only are very active in promoting sustainable efforts within their organisations but also were some of the earliest in the endeavour.

The study reported that these 'world-class' companies, as they were referred to, are becoming more sustainable because, among other reasons, it is helping to improve their brand reputation and recognition, reduce their operating costs, and give them a competitive edge. The study also found that more and more companies are becoming aware that becoming Greener and more sustainable can bear fruit, and they are starting to mimic these world-class firms.

If this study and these trends are true, then it begs the question: 'If the big kids are getting more and more sustainable and profiting from it, should we be doing it too?'

The answer for jansan professionals in Australia and New Zealand, along with those in every corner of the world, is a resounding YES. There is no better time

in a more sustainable manner.

But before we talk about how, we should take a second to define what the word sustainable means, since the definition has been evolving in recent years.

Sustainable or sustainability now refers to what is commonly known as the 'triple bottom line', which is people, planet, and profits. This means that a sustainable business is one that has fair and equitable business practices toward its workers and community; is aware of its environmental impact and carefully manages the amount of natural resources it uses in its operations; and is economically profitable, the core reason for being in business in the first place.

Now with that clarified, what do embracers do that makes them more sustainable? The following are seven practices that they apparently share:

- 1. Move early and be bold:** Some of these embracers were out of the 'sustainable starting gate' long before they really knew what sustainability was all about or how it would impact their firms. They were bold. Their top executives knew becoming more sustainable was a trend of the future and they wanted their companies to lead the trend, not follow in the paths of others. Your takeaway: Learn more about sustainability and see where your company can become more sustainable now.
- 2. Make it top-down driven:** Although the study did find employees can help push a company to become more sustainable, for the most part it is a top-down trend that starts in the executive offices and then involves everyone else in the company. However, just because it starts at the top does not mean all direction should remain at the top. Many companies find that enlisting their employees in the sustainability effort has resulted in some of the most significant ideas, gains, and benefits.
- 3. Have short-term and long-term goals:** Becoming sustainable is an ongoing process. Long-term goals might involve reducing a company's environmental

footprint by 20 percent or more in three years. However, it can start with short-term 'wins', such as reducing fuel consumption by 5 percent in the next six months.

- 4. Measure everything:** Dashboard systems now available for the professional cleaning industry can play an essential role in helping companies become more sustainable. Plain and simple, you can't manage what you can't measure. Using a dashboard system, some of which are Web-based and surprisingly cost effective, a jansan firm can measure its fuel use, energy, water, waste, and other usage now and use this as a benchmark toward future improvements.
- 5. Integrate sustainability into all business practices:** When looking for a new carpet extractor, what's one of the first questions you ask? Usually it is how much does the machine cost. The embracers ask this question, of course, but they also ask, how sustainable is this machine? Will this machine help us reduce energy, water, and chemical use? Let sustainability inform all of your decisions.
- 6. Recognise there will be intangible benefits:** The embracers soon realised that becoming more sustainable helped improve the bottom line in several ways. But they also realised there were intangible benefits. Becoming more sustainable, for instance, demonstrates a firm's commitment to the community and planet. This may not necessarily result in profits, at least short-term, but long-term it can do much to improve the perception of a company among its customers and potential customers.
- 7. Be realistic and transparent:** Even some of the leading embracers have found there are segments of their business that are not as sustainable as they would like and that this may be an ongoing problem. The best thing to do is to be realistic and transparent about the situation. Hiding the information can denigrate all of the sustainable gains and efforts the company has already embraced and established.

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Sustainability Dashboard Tools is a Web-based system that allows cleaning professionals to measure the natural resources their businesses use and the greenhouse gas emissions they generate. Armed with this information, businesses can make commonsense changes that reduce their impact on the environment. Such changes save businesses money and make them more efficient and competitive while also benefiting their facilities, employees, and local community as well as the environment.