Ray Anderson: Great leader of our time passes

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If there was a Dictionary of Green Building, Ray Anderson is whose picture you'd probably see alongside the word "leader." And I'm saddened to hear that he passed away yesterday, losing a heroic 20 month battle with cancer.

Ray was a legend of corporate sustainability, a man whose personal story – a story of an epiphany that changed a life and an entire industry – could be a metaphor for the entire green building movement. When he started Interface Inc. in Atlanta, Georgia, in 1973, his entrepreneurial genius was immediately clear. Before long, Interface was a billion-dollar-a-year business and one of the largest interior furnishings companies in the world.

But Interface is in the business of carpeting, and carpet traditionally uses a lot of petroleum, *a lot* of water, and creates a lot of waste.

Ray's epiphany moment, the moment of truth that he has called a "spear to the chest," was the same one that several of us experienced — reading Paul Hawken's *Ecology of Commerce* and getting permission to be both a capitalist and an environmentalist. It launched the transformation of Interface, and of the entire carpet industry, and set the foundation for USGBC.

Under his leadership, Interface was set on a goal of zero environmental impact companywide, a target of eliminating petroleum entirely from its manufacturing process, and a commitment to sustainability as Ray defined it: taking nothing from the earth that is not naturally and rapidly renewable.

But perhaps what made Ray's leadership so important and so effective was the way he has completely negated the argument that environmental sustainability can only be had at the expense of economic prosperity. Interface's remarkable success – and the positive business impact that has come as a result of its reputation as a sustainability pioneer – stands as a strong example that without a strong triple bottom line, you're never truly successful.

Ray was a personal hero of mine, a man who truly changed the world.

I'm grateful that last year, USGBC was able to present him with a USGBC leadership award at Greenbuild. It was a small tribute to a great man, but it meant more to me than anything I've done in a long time.

I invite you to share with us your personal and favorite Ray story. He touched us all in one way or another.

Rick Fedrizzi
CEO & Founding Chairman
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