In Good (and Green) Company

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It's no secret that business as usual is changing: A Deloitte study found that 90 percent of companies have set goals for their electricity and energy management practices. Two-thirds of CFOs are involved in their company's sustainability strategies. From chief sustainability officers to corporate sustainability reports, consciousness about environmental impact has entered the C-suite. That's pretty exciting.

For many of you, USGBC member companies and sustainability trailblazers, the concepts of "green business," "sustainable business," and "responsible business" - are far from new. You were there at the beginning. You *created* the beginning. I think of Ray Anderson, Paul Hawken, and countless other sustainability-focused business minds who have been living these ideals for decades.

Whether your company was an early adopter or a recent convert in this culture shift, we're hurtling toward an apex where green business and good business are synonymous. But on this journey, we need to think bigger than business as usual, redefining what sustainable business means. I have a few insights to offer, the first two of which are courtesy of USGBC's leader and visionary, Rick Fedrizzi.

1. "Every story about a green building is a story about people."

Humanity and sustainability are inextricably linked. Take LEED: It doesn't exclusively address measures that are good for the environment, but also those that are healthful and optimal for building occupants – all of us, and for generations to come. Consider a high-performing school building, for example, where children can learn from their sustainable surroundings; in spaces designed to optimize their concentration and health. They'll grow up as "sustainability natives," bringing those ideals to their own children some day. What could be more sustainable and human than that?

As the business realm shifts toward sustainable operations, and our existing passions grow even deeper, it's important to remember that green business and good business are nothing without people. The green building movement wouldn't carry any relevance without the people who believe in it, who advocate for it, and who carry out the mission.

The lesson is: Build your people in to your 2013 sustainability outlook. Take steps to acknowledge them, inspire them, and in turn, learn from them – whether it's through mentoring programs, a professional development initiative, or well-deserved holiday bonuses.

Green is good, but becomes better when the green people are a part of the plan. That's truly sustainable.

2. "We'll know that we have achieved what we set out to do when we have put ourselves out of business."

With full market uptake of green building, with a universal understanding that green buildings are healthier, better for the environment and cost-effective for our economy, there will be no need for green building councils. The word "green building" will be redundant. "Green buildings" will just be "buildings." We'll go out of business because it's everybody's business.

This "Rick-ism" is an especially poignant business lesson. A business is nothing without conviction, a central focus to unite your staff and a mission toward which to work.

If that mission is sustainability, build it in to the culture of your company – don't silo it in to a single role or report.

3. "Stay hungry. Stay fearless."

Steve Jobs, a man we quote quite often around the USGBC offices, coined the original phrase as “Stay foolish.” Foolishness has its merits, but fearlessness is even better (and more difficult). When I think back on my career, my fearless moments were the ones that propelled me higher and farther than those that were calculated and safe. When I consider the companies I admire most, it’s their bold pursuit of the unknown that resonates with me.

It’s about leaving your comfort zone – willingly, and without apology. These are the moments and actions that define leadership, for an individual or for a company.

In the realm of sustainability this means going bigger, farther, and better - with no fear. Whatever you’re doing in sustainability now could be stronger in a month. In a year. In ten years. Keep your edge, and keep scaling up your sustainability efforts. Do it fearlessly. Think outside of the corporate sustainability box.

Otherwise, you’ll be left behind.

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