



## **CEF Roundtable: Comparing Notes on Corporate Sustainability Training Programs**

**Anonymized Meeting Summary**

**Tuesday, November 17, 2020 | 1:00-2:00pm EST**

### **Examples Shared of Corporate Sustainability Training:**

- **“Sustainability Academy”** in collaboration with the Erb Institute that reaches 40-50 employees a year across the organization, trains them in key skills such as LCA and measuring ROI, and then **assigns a project with mentors and milestones.**
  - Also included some customer interface, brought in an academic institution to help them learn more sustainability skills to work together on solutions.
  - Cost several hundred thousand per year. Has led to 115 projects total.
  - Project have included sustainability ROI; waste diversion; engaging customers on sustainability; and sustainable materials. More people participated from R&F and corporate functions, they really needed to work to get people to participate from manufacturing.
  - Employees had to apply – could self-nominate or be nominated. Was very competitive evaluation process by committee. They looked at how it fit with their employee development plan and there was an effort to make it diverse in terms of function, inclusion, geography, etc.
  - Projects were also nominated and evaluated against criteria that included fit with company sustainability goals and business unit objectives. There was a learning process over time about how to scope projects that would meet milestones in a short time period.
  - With this approach it was very necessary to be in-person – have had to stop due to Covid.
  - Has been effective at capturing sustainability interest across the organization so that demand for training now more than budget can allow.
  - They are now seeking ways to reach more employees globally in a way that is less resource intensive, for instance leveraging an outside partner like GreenBiz or the Cambridge Programme.
  
- **A training video series** that has new episodes throughout the year to keep people excited about sustainability (sent to employees via email and included in onboarding materials).
  - These videos can be produced in-house or by a professional production company; companies on the call have had success with both approaches.
  - Topics range from a high-level overview of the company’s sustainability strategy to focused sustainability topics geared towards specific employee groups (e.g., socializing sustainable design and circular economy principles with engineers and procurement), as well as ethics and compliance.

- Some topics, in particular those related to EHS compliance, can be challenging to present in a way that is not dry.
- A **voluntary sustainability ambassador training** program that enables employees to be formally recognized by the company as “sustainability champions.”
  - There is a certification that they can achieve with 3 levels. It is tied to their official competencies.
  - Some programs allow sustainability ambassadors to represent the company in external engagements (e.g., client-facing presentations on sustainable product offerings) on the topic of sustainability.
- A **collaboration with an external academic institution** for a circularity class oriented to engineers and designers.
- A **thought leadership speaker series** that brings in external speakers to discuss a topic the company is prioritizing that year, and invites internal senior-level executives to discuss how they are addressing sustainability in their respective organizations.
  - For example, a speaker series could be built around Earth Day and occur over an 8-week period, featuring a new speaker each week.
- **Hands-on activities** — such as product teardowns and waste sorting — that prompt employees to think outside of their siloes.
- **Employee resource groups** focused on empowering employees to develop and lead sustainability initiatives in their communities.
- **Innovation challenges** that enable employees to tackle sustainability challenges within their business function.
- **“Communities of Practice”** that are technically focused, for instance on natural capital or LCA.
  - They are attended by hundreds of employees and get likeminded people in the same room to talk and network, creating a lot of organic growth.
- Other offerings include: Monthly lunch and learn sessions; monthly webinar series with presentations from NGO/non-profit partners and internal sustainability leaders; action-oriented emails that offer ideas for improving sustainable living practices at home and in the workplace; community based projects such as tree planting, beach cleanups, etc; centralized online resource hub that features employee sustainability training/education opportunities and other external resources focused on sustainable living.

**Resources and tools recommended by members for sustainability training/education:**

- **WeSpire** offers a suite of employee engagement tools, such as weekly and monthly competitions. These enable employees to exchange ideas on how to be more sustainable at home and in the workplace. WeSpire provides most of the content for environment and social impact topics.
- **EcoChallenge.org** (formerly Northwest Earth Institute) has a series of 8-week-long virtual discussion courses on environment- and social-related topics, including a course on peace, justice, equality and sustainability.
- **Stuart Hart’s** program at **University of Vermont** (the program behind the new GreenBiz offering): <https://www.wholeworks-1st.com/greenbiz>
- The **Centre for Sustainability Excellence’s** sustainability certification program.
- The **Erb Institute**

- **Cambridge Program for Sustainability Leadership**

### Lessons learned

- Engaging senior leaders can present unique challenges in terms of sustainability training:
  - Sometimes they think they know more than they do.
  - One company has planned a new **training specifically with senior teams**, with objective of helping those leaders support the teams they manage, to “cascade the message”
  - **Including sustainability in the company vision and ambition** helps ensure that sustainability cannot be ignored – important to have the support of the CEO.
- **Tying compensation to ESG performance** throughout the organization is key.
  - Including ESG performance and metrics in quarterly investor materials also helps drive the importance home and can help make the case for compensation.
  - Where tying it to pay is not possible, tying it to budget, for instance talking about efficiencies and cost savings, can be very effective.
- For others there is clarity at the top and bottom, but **the “middle” is the challenge**. Can help to tie to senior manager expectations, **breaking it down to the specific objectives** that are more resonant with them, **such as risk and publicly stated goals** (as opposed to broader sustainability concepts like climate change).
- It is important to have the **right messengers/figureheads involved**. Middle management listens when senior leaders regularly speak to the importance of sustainability.
- People consume information differently; it is important to have several different training/education offerings and **“meet people where they are.”**
- Trainings boost employee awareness around what sustainability means to the company and how that translates to different job categories.
- Compelling training programs can be an effective **recruiting tool** – important make sure their hiring teams are aware of sustainability trainings that are available.
- It’s important to **measure the effectiveness of training**, for instance to determine whether self-paced training is the best approach, does the content make sense to the user, are they getting what they need out of it to translate it to their function? Etc.
- When it is possible, can be very well received if trainings that are designed for specific functions, for instance product design, circularity, supply chain, are **made available for any employee** to opt into.