
A New Generation of Leaders, Inspiring New Demands for Sustainability

A movement toward a more sustainable future is taking shape in offices across North America. Workplaces today are more likely to have composting bins in the kitchen, solar panels on the roof and efficient LED lights overhead. A great deal of credit for these changes belongs to a generation of young professionals, who are pushing companies to step up their commitment to sustainability.

Look no further than the built environment for proof of this trend. Companies competing for millennial talent are increasingly investing in workplaces with a lower carbon footprint and environments that support employee wellness. In turn, forward-looking property owners are investing in green-certified buildings, knowing these will be the assets that thrive tomorrow—much like the happy, healthy employees working within them.

We spoke with Puninda Thind, Sustainability Manager at Bentall Kennedy, and a 2017 Top 30 Under 30 Sustainability Leader awardee, about how the millennial generation can help drive a more sustainable future.

You've worked on sustainability issues for governments, the private sector and NGO's alike. What unique challenges does the private sector offer in terms of making an impact?

In today's world, consideration for the environment is simply no longer an option: organizations must continuously strive toward sustainability. It's increasingly clear that what's good for the environment and society is also good for business. I think the private sector is uniquely positioned to make a positive impact because its influence is felt across such a wide variety of stakeholders, from employees, investors and clients, to the supply chain, academia and civil society.

Consumers are often skeptical of companies that claim to be green. How can employees determine that the companies they work for are the real deal?

Skepticism is healthy in this area. Employers that genuinely “walk the walk” will have many ways to demonstrate their efforts, and inherently recognize the importance of transparency. I suggest starting in the obvious place: the corporate social responsibility report. Its pages should speak to the strong connection between sustainability and the company's values, purpose and strategic direction. Read it with a critical eye. How transparent is the organization about its impact? Do they have employee engagement efforts focused on sustainability? What third parties have validated and recognized the company for its efforts?

Like so many people of my generation, it is important to me to work for a company that takes sustainability seriously. Bentall Kennedy first caught my eye a couple of years ago when I first learned about a waste management program they had initiated in a building I often visited. Since joining the company, I've witnessed firsthand how deeply sustainability is infused within our company culture. When the sustainability message is integrated within a company's brand, products and services, you can be sure it's the real deal.

What advice would you give to someone trying to make a difference on sustainability in their place of work?

Approach sustainability like a business challenge (which it is). Consider how your idea aligns with overall business priorities and how it will add value to the company. Developing a strong business case with measurable outcomes is critical. Remember



that it's all about people, and your ability to inspire coworkers to endorse your ideas will ultimately shape your success. A champion—or multiple champions—with in the organization can help you navigate the journey from concept to making your sustainability idea a reality. Try to connect with people across the organization who share your passion, from C-level executives to enthusiastic support staff. Everyone has something unique to contribute. Working together, you will find synergies, enhance ideas, avoid reinventing the wheel and ease the implementation of your plan.

Do you think that companies with a strong focus on social responsibility and sustainability have a competitive advantage when recruiting?

Ours is a generation that looks beyond good intentions and instead seeks out tangible action combined with integrity. And it all starts at the top. I think young people increasingly want to work for organizations that are actively invested in the betterment of their workforce, the environment and society at large.

As companies compete more intensely than ever for talent, a corporate culture that makes sustainability and social responsibility a foundational element of its core business values is bound to have a competitive advantage when recruiting and retaining the next generation of business leaders. ■