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# Helping the environment helps the bottom line too

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When was the last time you turned on the news or opened a business publication and did not see a reference to the economic crisis? It is nearly impossible to escape. Despite slight signs of improvement, the conditions continue to force many companies to cut back. Layoffs and budget adjustments have become all too common. Due to the struggles in staying afloat, few companies are thinking about “greening” their operations.

They have too many other issues to deal with. And green changes will cost too much, right? I realize times are tough, but I want to challenge that thinking.

There is not a better time to work to reduce your organization’s impact on the environment than now. Not only will it help give a much-needed boost to employee morale, but it will boost your bottom line as well.

There is a common misconception that reducing your impact on the environment costs money. The reason is we often focus on recycling as the saving grace of our Earth. Thus, many business folks think an important step in going green is buying recycled paper. I cannot make the argument that recycled paper is cheaper. My argument is that we should not be so focused on recycling. We need to consider the two other R’s — reducing and reusing.

While recycling is important, in a lot of ways it is just a patch, a last resort to make up for all the waste we created. Before we start thinking about recycling our waste, let’s think about how we can reduce and reuse it.

To do that, consider one of the biggest waste streams for organizations: paper.

The average office worker uses 10,000 sheets of copy paper each year, according to the Environmental Protection Agency. If your office has 50 employees, you are using about 500,000 sheets of paper a year. The annual cost for that paper is about \$4,000.

If you can reduce your company’s consumption of paper, you will make a positive step for the environment and improve your bottom line.

Here are three simple ways to start:

n The easiest and fastest way to reduce the use of paper is to default all computers to doubled-sided printing. With just a few quick clicks, you can cut your paper waste and expense in half.

n **Second, use GreenPrint ([www.greenprinter.com](http://www.greenprinter.com)).**

This simple software helps eliminate unwanted pages. It is especially helpful when printing from the Web and eliminating those pages with just a URL, banner ad or legal disclaimer.

n Finally, add a simple statement to the signature of your e-mails: “Please consider the impact on the environment and your responsibility before printing this e-mail.” This can help reduce unnecessary printing of e-mails by your employees, clients, vendors and other partners.

Reducing our consumption of paper is not going to save the Earth or be the catalyst to high growth and profitability, but extending that thinking to all areas of your organization can definitely help.

Let’s look at one more big business expense and environmental foe: travel. While it is hard to replace the face-to-face nature of in-person gatherings, most of the time meetings can be handled with a simple conference call or Web meeting.

If the meeting requires groups of people scattered across the country, set up a call through [FreeConferenceCall.com](http://FreeConferenceCall.com). You will avoid travel expenses and emissions, and the call is free. You can even set up a free recording to play back the call.

If more intensive interaction is required through a PowerPoint presentation or other electronic visual software, consider a Web meeting. [WebEx \(www.webex.com\)](http://WebEx.com) offers a variety of online meeting services.

Those recommendations just scratch the surface of possibilities for saving money and reducing your environmental impact. If you want to maximize the potential, organize an internal committee to analyze your organization and develop a specific plan.

If you do pursue that path, a few important tips may be helpful.

First, support this initiative at the highest levels of the organization. If people think they are working for change that will not be supported, you may actually be doing more harm than good.

Second, do not force people to participate. The best work will come from people who are passionate about the cause.

Finally, consider having internal teams compete to make the biggest reduction in environmental impact while saving the most money. You could also consider joining Net Impact's Green Challenge ([www.netimpact.org](http://www.netimpact.org)) and compete against other organizations (large and small) across the country.

If you decide an internal "green team" is the way to go, you will be on the right path for a more efficient future. You will build morale by showing employees you are looking to cut more than jobs and do something good for the environment at the same time.

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