

## WASHINGTON BUSINESS JOURNAL

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# Be a good business, and you'll be a green business

Washington Business Journal - by [Jeremy Litchfield](#)

We see the call to “go green” everywhere: on TV, radio and the Internet, in magazines, newspapers and books. The barrage of advice to green your home, your life and your business is inescapable.

Throughout the coming months, this column will address being greener in the business world — how to do it, why to do it, how to use it to increase your bottom line and how to tap into the lucrative green scene.

But first, it is important to be on the same page with respect to the definition of a “green business.” Unfortunately, my definition may disappoint. There is no definition.

Using the term “green business” is like using “red business” or “black business” to describe organizations that are losing or making money. It just doesn't make sense.

People who use the term “green business” usually are referring to a business that operates in a way that decreases its negative impact on the environment, including reducing the amount of pollution, manufacturing waste or CO2 emissions.

But let's be very clear. These wonderful reductions are not based on operational tactics or even an operational strategy. The actions are based on a mix of the organization's values and core attributes.

Companies such as **Patagonia Inc.**, **Stonyfield Farm**, **Whole Foods Market Inc.**, **Burt's Bees Inc.** and Honest Tea, which are referred to as “green,” typically share values and attributes such as reducing pollution, curbing global warming, supporting biodiversity and reserving natural spaces.

But there are also other traits that they share, like being innovative, efficient and profitable, creating a positive work environment, maintaining low employee turnover and exercising maximum use of material.

If you think the first group of attributes makes the companies green, you're flat out wrong. It's the second group of traits that actually make them successful and green.

In fact, when you look at all these values together, the combination does not say “green business,” it says “good business.”

If you were to list the values and traits of your organization, you will likely find that your company shares a lot in common with the stereotypical green company. However, the question is: Does your organization truly live up to those values and core traits? Sadly, for many, the answer is no.

Now, what does this mean for you as a small business owner, senior executive, middle manager or even an intern?

Well, let's start with a trait that most companies would like to say they possess: efficiency, or doing more with less. A dedication to efficiency can help reduce your impact on the environment.

**UPS** is a good example. The package delivery company burns millions and millions of gallons of gas per year. I doubt most people would consider it a green company.

However, is one of UPS' core traits efficiency? Absolutely. Its whole model is based upon delivering more packages by driving or flying fewer miles. UPS continually seeks more efficient practices, and in 2007 it implemented a rather odd one — no left turns. Why no left turns? Internal studies showed that if UPS drivers avoided left turns, they could save time and ultimately deliver more packages.

The results proved the studies correct. Not only was the company able to eliminate 30 million miles from its fleet, but a delivering more packages with fewer miles also saved 3 million gallons of gas.

That reduction in gas did more than help the company's bottom line. It also reduced UPS' negative impact on the environment.

UPS cut emissions by 32,000 metric tons of CO2, the equivalent of taking 5,300 passenger cars off the road for an entire year.

Is UPS a so-called “green business” or just a good business? You know the answer.

Few businesses run a fleet of vehicles that consume tens of millions of gasoline a year, but all of us rely on resources to make our businesses function. So how can we use fewer resources for the same amount of work, without sacrificing quality?

One resource nearly all of us require is electricity. It lights our offices and powers our computers and other electronic equipment. If we can efficiently manage our electricity use, we can save money and lessen our impact on the environment.

It's not hard. Switch all office lights to compact fluorescent or light-emitting diode (LED), send a daily e-mail to remind employees to shut off the lights before they leave, put motion detectors on lights in low traffic areas (restrooms, conference rooms, etc.), upgrade to more energy-efficient windows and set all office computers to go into energy-efficient mode after five or 10 minutes of inactivity.

The solutions are not always this easy, but when you dig into the details, great ideas rise to the surface.

As Dr. Seuss taught us when we were young, "Think left and think right and think low and think high. Oh, the things you can think up if only you try!"

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