

Green Leadership

By: Rob Nagel

Business leadership is more topical than ever. Whether they are listed or unlisted, non-profit or not, corporates around the globe are grappling with the economic and regulatory environments, and increasingly, the green environment. The green environment is closest to my heart - I firmly believe that within the current economic turmoil, true leaders are those that show themselves to be not only business leaders, but also 'green sustainable' leaders.

My perspective on leadership for this article has a distinctly green flavour. I have used various examples from around the globe of what the green leaders are up to – some of which can and should be adopted and incorporated into similar businesses in South Africa, not only to green their business but also to make them more efficient and flexible.

'Cloud Computing' is a buzzword resonating through the IT budgeting processes of a number of corporates over the past few months. Most computer or cell phone users are unaware of the carbon footprint of storing data. According to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), data centres in the USA currently consume two percent of the annual electricity produced in the USA. Canvas Dream (a web hosting company in the US) is a good example of green leadership in this area. The company believes that using 100% wind power for their business energy 'is just not enough.' Besides using 100% new, renewable, locally-generated wind energy to power their facilities, they have also designed and built their own data servers, reducing electricity by 60% compared to servers that are bought off the shelf. In addition, Canvas Dream has never over-sold data space to their customers and the company participates in certified e-cycling for responsible waste stream management. It has reduced staff commuting by 90% by introducing a pro-active telecommuting policy and one tree is planted for every new customer gained.

A green business closer to home is Cape Town based KayaGas – a company embracing the benefits of combining positive environmental and social impact. KayaGas supplies subsidised gas stoves to low income homes to replace their paraffin stoves. Liquid Petroleum Gas (LPG) is a cleaner fuel that is non-toxic, less likely to trigger allergies and does not produce soot. Furthermore KayaGas is involved with the development and redesign of equipment and appliances to make them cheaper, safer and more appropriate to the lower income market.

According to a study undertaken by Markinor; 4000 children die each year from drinking paraffin, 50 000 people are burned and 63 000 homes are destroyed from paraffin related fires in South Africa. The 200 000 households that KayaGas plans to service will benefit from a modern and safe alternative to paraffin which has had such a devastating impact on the lives and health of the poorer communities. The project will also create new jobs and support over 200 retailers in the townships of Cape Town.

My last example of a truly green company is that of Pizza fusion. Americans eat over 100 acres of pizza a day. To this end, the creators of Pizza Fusion set out to create a greener eating experience. Their pizza is organic and baked in a natural gas oven while the restaurant makes use solely of wind power. Uniforms are organic cotton, the salad containers are compostable, cutlery is made from sugar cane, the napkins are created wholly from post consumer fibre and the pizzas are delivered in a green vehicle. On a local level, these practices could be applied by many large corporates that have a canteen on the premises. In addition, thousands of fast food outlets around the country could implement green practices.

South Africa is the first country worldwide to adopt the new Integrated Accounting Standard – something we should be proud of. This report allows leaders to 'reflect on the social, environmental, economic and financial impacts of the organisation they lead, and demonstrate, though integrated reporting, integrity, transparency and accountability in their activities.'

Although companies are complying with the Integrating Accounting Standards, the process should be seen less as a box-ticking exercise and more as a holistic practice. It will take true 'Green Leaders' to drive change and progress in this field. ■



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