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Five steps to achieving sustainability success

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During tough economic times, organizations today struggle to justify a meaningful investment in green initiatives, because they perceive the efforts will generate added costs, not concrete business benefits.

This misperception presents a major problem for global sustainability progress. In order to launch and maintain a substantive sustainability strategy in a profit-oriented organizational structure, it must deliver a definable ROI.

There is a pragmatic solution to this problem. I believe it is possible for businesses today to develop environmental initiatives that will make a quantifiable contribution to both the environment and the bottom line. At Xerox, we know first-hand that what is good for the environment is also good for business thanks to a decades-long commitment to sustainability.

Here are 5 steps to achieving sustainability success in your business:

1. Explore the entire value chain of your business: Don't narrow your focus to one functional area. Open your mind to improvements and innovations that could reduce environmental impacts throughout your value chain. When you take time to consider all of the working components of your value chain, you will expand the playing field for smart green initiatives.
 2. Use disciplined, quantitative analysis to identify your best opportunities: Analytical tools and methodologies developed for proven quality management programs like Lean Six Sigma can help you identify problems and opportunities that will produce the biggest benefits in the shortest time frame. Goals and metrics align and empower the organization.
 3. Make sure the proposed improvement or innovation will deliver both economic and environmental benefits: In today's highly competitive business environment, quantifiable benefits are an essential requirement for any "smart way to green." So it's important to assess the win-win potential of any project before you begin active development. Economics is one of the three pillars of sustainability.
 4. Think "partnerships": To maximize your opportunity for success, you need to team up with suppliers, customers, outsourcing providers and other partners. At Xerox, for example, we work with all of the partners in our value chain to reduce waste, energy use, greenhouse gases and our overall environmental impact.
 5. Be innovative: Innovation is a vital cog in the big green machine. So when you begin working on green initiatives, think outside the box. Take a fresh look at the way you operate throughout your value chain or how you are evaluating cost to the business. And look for opportunities to innovate.
- Beyond these 5 steps, you must be passionate about what you are doing. In a very real sense, it's a privilege to be involved in work of such far-reaching importance. If you let that sense of mission inspire you, you will bring a deep sense of commitment and determination to your efforts, which will inspire those around you. That, in turn, will help you become even more effective as a champion of sustainability in your organization.

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