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Strategic positioning in green and sustainability... Why you need it and how you capture it

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"Green and sustainability"...you see and hear it everywhere; in traditional media, social media, board rooms, back rooms, class rooms, and even in cocktail conversation. Why, because the green economy represents a growth sector, unique in a depressed market. Also because "greening" buildings offers operating cost reductions that are significant, heavily subsidized, and provide features that reduce tenant turnover and unwanted vacancies. But beyond that, although sustainability initiatives may not be the highest priority for businesses today, they have proven to deliver results in many areas that are.

In addition to savings in operating costs, sustainability strategies can impact high business priorities such as; increased revenue, reduced risk, enhanced brand positioning, new customer acquisition, greater employee productivity and retention, and sustainable competitive advantage. And these benefits can accrue to businesses of all types and sizes.

As a result, sustainability is no longer just about compliance, and social responsibility it is about transformation to a smarter, more profitable, more competitive business model with significant first mover advantage.

If you have a written business plan today that incorporates sustainability initiatives, congratulations, you are in a leadership position. If not, your competitors likely do and if you want to get started use the following steps:

1. See it - Understand the current situation, internally and externally and brainstorm on anticipated changes in technology, regulations, competition, etc. during your planning horizon (3-5 years). From that, "see" and articulate a vision for your sustainability opportunities that has a positive impact on the company, community and environment.
2. Plan it - Develop quantitative objectives and strategies around key sustainability drivers. These Objectives should be consistent with your business culture, and projects should pass the hurdles of your established evaluation criteria.
3. Do it -Communicate and execute priorities through Action Plans that engage employees and stakeholders and include due dates and accountability.
4. Document it - Develop metrics and track progress against sustainability and other objectives. Metrics clearly define success, manage expectations of stakeholders, and provide both cause for celebration when targets are met and early warning signals when adjustments are needed.

Hopefully you are now ready to pursue step 1, "seeing" a sustainability opportunity for your business. That sounds like a perfect agenda item for your next management team meeting, and it could bring notoriety in your next cocktail conversation as well.

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