

A hiker with a red backpack stands on a large rock peak, looking out over a vast mountain valley. The sky is a clear, pale blue, and the mountains in the distance are hazy. The hiker is wearing a green jacket and black pants.

PURPOSE & SOCIAL IMPACT

DISPATCHES FROM THE FRONTLINES OF THE PURPOSE- DRIVEN LANDSCAPE

A FINN Partners Publication

FINN
PARTNERS

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LETTER FROM PETER FINN

It's been more than a decade since I took a leap of faith and decided to build a business based on what I believe to be an incontrovertible fact: true business success depends upon moral leadership. When an organization has purpose, it can achieve greater prosperity than one that puts profits over people and planet.

The issues of our time, from climate change to social justice, are clear and urgent. In a time of increasing political division, purpose-driven organizations have a responsibility to take the lead and drive positive change to build a better future for all.

In the following pages, you'll read the words of professionals authentically dedicated to the preservation of the planet and the prosperity of its people. Every day, they apply their energy and expertise to serve clients who seek to find and articulate their own purpose. At FINN Partners, we are privileged to work collaboratively with organizations large and small, for-profit and nonprofit, across many industry sectors, to build coalitions of like-minded partners to make a difference.

This is at the heart of the FINN Purpose and Social Impact Practice.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Peter Finn'. The signature is fluid and cursive.

Peter Finn, CEO & Founding Managing Partner

PURPOSE-DRIVEN LEADERSHIP

Rod Alexander
Senior Partner,
Employee Engagement



More than 20 years into his career, Rod is still driven by communication. What's changed is what he's working toward. Not just magic but meaning. Not just passion, but purpose. He seeks out opportunities to make real, lasting, and positive impact with clients. For their communities, for their people and for the world we share. He's had the privilege of working with a wide range of forward-thinking clients, including Google, Charles Schwab, lululemon, VMware, Light & Wonder, CVS, and Humana. He's passionate about bringing the skills gained from his deep background in advertising and marketing to the worlds of employee engagement, change management and corporate social responsibility.

Gil Bashe
Chair Global Health and Purpose



Nothing has kept Gil Bashe from advancing people's well-being from battlefield to boardroom. As a combat medic in an elite paratrooper unit, he tended to the wounded under fire. As a C-suite and global practice leader, he sees communications as the bridge to connect healers from around the world with those seeking to be healed. Through it all, he is dedicated to making a difference in people's lives and instilling a culture where colleagues are empowered to do the same. At FINN Partners, which makes a difference through collaboration and shared values, he has a role to which he is ideally suited. As Chair Global Health and Purpose at FINN, he champions both sectors within one of the world's leading integrated marketing and communications agencies.

Cullen Burnell
Vice President, Chief of Staff
Health and Purpose



Cullen serves as Chief of Staff to FINN's Global Purpose Practice. He's had a wide-ranging career, from his start at global sports media giant ESPN to a stint in public service in New York State government to time at Baker McKenzie, one of the world's leading law firms. The underlying throughline of his professional experience has been a commitment to the belief that everyone's voice and story matter; that when you focus on the humanity at the core of every business, you can achieve great things. He believes that doing the right thing is both a moral and economic imperative, and is passionate about helping organizations committed to social causes and good corporate citizenship become the best versions of themselves.

Jeff Freedman
Managing Partner,
Integrated Marketing



Jeff founded Boston advertising firm, Small Army, in 2002, and became a Managing Partner at FINN Partners when they joined the agency in 2019. In his 30+ years of marketing, he has helped hundreds of regional, national and global brands build stronger relationships with people by helping them discover their soul and share it through creative storytelling. Jeff is a regular blogger and speaker on leadership and purpose-driven marketing (including two TEDx Talks) and is the author of the book "The Moral of the Story, A Storytellers Guide to Help Brands Build Relationships with People."

Betsy Henning
Managing Partner, Global
Employee Engagement
Practice Lead



Betsy leads FINN's Global Employee Engagement Practice. A marketer at heart, she believes in the power of stories to shift perspectives, transform thinking, and change lives. From her first job to founding her own agency AHA, a FINN Partners Company, in 1994, she's spent her career helping clients connect more deeply with customers, partners, and particularly employees. Along with driving great brand marketing, she's also led global clients in sustainability and corporate responsibility communications for more than 25 years across industries as diverse as toys and entertainment, healthcare, technology, financial services and luxury goods.

Bob Martineau
Senior Partner, Environmental
Policy and Communications



Bob is an environmental and sustainability expert and attorney with decades of experience in the public and private sector. He served as the Commissioner of the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation (TDEC) for Governor Bill Haslam. Previously, he was a partner at Waller—one of the largest law firms in Tennessee—and was a Senior Attorney in the Office of General Counsel at the United States Environmental Protection Agency in Washington D.C. He has served as Board Chair for the Legal Aid Society of Middle Tennessee, First Steps, Inc., the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation and Community Health Charities and is a member of the American College of Environmental Lawyers.

Helen Shelton
Global Chief Diversity Officer



As FINN's Global Chief Diversity Officer, Helen is a passionate and dedicated DEI strategist, serving as a trusted point of counsel for corporations and brands facing DEI challenges and crises both internally and externally. She works tirelessly in the industry not only to advance diversity, equity, and inclusion in both the corporate and non-profit sectors, but also to advance important causes, including health and education disparities, domestic violence, voter education and access to the arts and culture for underserved communities, disparate unemployment, health disparities, and disease awareness initiatives.

Amy Terpeluk
Managing Partner, CSR & Social
Impact



Amy has dedicated her career to counseling leading brands, nonprofits, government agencies, and startups to help them find their rightful place on the frontlines of social impact and responsible business. Her expertise is in crafting programs for businesses and society that address social, economic, and environmental issues. She's particularly proud of her work building coalitions and directing national initiatives to address education equality and access, public health, domestic violence and sexual assault prevention, women's economic empowerment, and veterans' well-being, among others.

Bess Winston
Senior Partner, ESG Strategy
and Communications



Creating more resilient, sustainable, equitable, and thriving communities and enterprises has been Bess's mission and passion for most of her professional life and the heart of the work she's done since founding her own agency, the Winston Agency, a FINN Partners Company, in 2013. She's leveraged know-how in advocacy and communications to help blue chip companies and renowned organizations advance stories and commitments that are responsive to shifting societal priorities around climate adaptation, natural resource conservation, zero waste, circular economies, labor and human rights, and other pressing global issues of our time. Her issue expertise is complemented by robust experience in sectors as varied as apparel, manufacturing and supply chain, packaging and recycling, and food and beverage.

CHAPTER 1: CORPORATE REPUTATION

"Corporate reputation is a difficult needle to thread. It's about cultivating an authentic vision of an organization and how it relates to the communities it touches. Positive reputation can take years to nurture but can be destroyed in an instant. It is purpose-driven companies, those that are conscientious and engaged, that have the best opportunity to build a resilient reputation based on honesty and genuine concern for people and the planet."

- Amy Terpeluk
Managing Partner, CSR & Social Impact



By: Cullen Burnell
Vice President, Chief of Staff Health and Purpose

CONNECTING TO CORPORATE PURPOSE

No one starts a business thinking it's not going to survive. Anyone who takes that leap of faith intends for their enterprise to serve as part of their legacy, a living monument representing the aspirations and, critically, values of those who built it. As human beings, our time is limited, so we're all driven in some way to do something that lives beyond our own mortality.

It's through this lens that leaders must examine the importance of positive societal impact in how their businesses relate to the wider world. No one on this planet exists in a vacuum. We're all connected, reliant upon each other whether we know it or not. Those who are aware of our connections enter into a pact with their families, communities, regions, nations, and the wider world: "I won't do anything that threatens your wellbeing, now or in the future."

Being human, we often fail. But socially conscious people the world over who possess the luxuries of circumstance, geography, and insight look beyond their immediate sphere of influence with an eye towards achieving good global citizenship. They recognize that what they do here and now creates ripples that extend well beyond our limited view.

Businesses are, at their core, human. Whether a global mega-conglomerate or a corner mom-and-pop, no organization would exist without the people who choose to devote their time and energy to its success. It's a simple truth, but one that leaders too often forget as their attention turns solely to stock price, products, or

competition. While these are important considerations, without maintaining some level of basic human concern, businesses can become soulless enterprises.

There's an increased expectation among a multitude of stakeholder groups – customers, shareholders, corporate partners, suppliers, non-profits, and governments – that the businesses they engage with or that share their communities do more than just fill the basic role of job creator. They recognize that companies large and small have a tremendous capacity to effect positive change in our society. They see that by marshaling resources, expertise, and communities, either solo or in conjunction with other like-minded organizations, businesses can move the needle in a way that few other pillars in our society can.

But why should they? "Virtue is its own reward" and "doing good is simply the right thing to do" are truisms that are not necessarily going to move the needle in the boardroom or on an investor call, where there's rightly a focus on return on investment. No business can survive without making money; if it's not around to do good, it doesn't matter how noble its leaders' intent was.

Environment and sustainability are good examples of arenas in which corporate leaders have recognized that doing nothing is simply no longer an option. They know that if supply chains collapse due to climate change, that's disastrous for their businesses.

The tougher sell is on social impact and general corporate purpose. These issues can be thorny, particularly in our increasingly contentious public discourse. The risk responsible organizations run is alienating a portion of

their stakeholder base through their action or inaction. Many corporate leaders wonder if they should take any kind of stand at all, but the data couldn't be clearer. A 2018 Accenture study found that

"62% OF AMERICAN CONSUMERS WANT COMPANIES TO TAKE A STAND ON CURRENT AND BROADLY RELEVANT ISSUES SUCH AS SUSTAINABILITY, TRANSPARENCY AND FAIR EMPLOYMENT PRACTICES."

Other studies show similar findings.

Business leaders are under some pressure to ensure that their decisions yield results in the next quarter. But as a corporate officer, if you're looking for immediate returns on your investment in socialization and marketing efforts across the social justice, sustainability, or DEI spectrum, you're going to be disappointed. There may be a win in the media cycle, but the likelihood of seeing tangible, monetary return in the immediate future – next week or next month – is low. Investing in positive societal impact is about long-term growth and building reputation as an integrated, conscientious member of a global community.

It means building trust over time and staying the course with consistency, resolve, and belief in the face of adversity. Indeed, CEOs surveyed as part of [Deloitte's 2019 Human Capital Trends](#) report indicated that the No. 1 issue of concern when measuring success was "impact on

society, including income inequality, diversity, and the environment." However, the report goes on to say that though leaders have recognized the issue, they haven't solved for it.

Ultimately, this focus on issues of social import does move the needle over time. According to 2015 research by Harvard Business Review, 58% of firms that prioritize business purpose grew at 10+% over the preceding three years. Conversely, 42% of those firms without a clearly defined corporate purpose reported flat or declining revenues during the same period, compared to just 15% of firms that prioritized it. What's more, self-identified purpose prioritizers more frequently reported successfully completing a major initiative over the course of the study – expanding geographically, changing their business model or operations, completing a merger, or launching a new product, for example.

The fact of the matter is that organizations don't create sterling corporate reputations overnight. They're planned, built, and earned over time. Think about how to create value three, five, even 10 years in the future. What are the pressing issues on which people will be looking for leadership? How can a business meet that need for leadership in a way that's aligned with organizational culture and values?

By being intentional about purpose and social impact, by recognizing and embracing the humanity at the core of every business, organizations can begin to find their niche in the fabric of our societies and rise to a position of meaningful leadership on meaningful issues. Those are the things that stick in people's minds and stand the test of time.

FOCUSING ON THE POSITIVE IN A NEGATIVE WORLD

By: Amy Terpeluk
Managing Partner, CSR & Social Impact

I have a six-year-old daughter who routinely amazes me, but there is one particular interaction we shared that I've been mulling over these past few weeks.

It was just after dusk, and the fireflies were out in force. My daughter joined me at our window, and we gazed into the darkness broken intermittently by the strobing light show put on by hundreds of the tiny insects. Without moving her eyes from the scene in front of us, she said:

“You know mom, the world is a magical place.”

I was moved—almost to tears—by her innocent observation. In a time of tremendous global political strife, climate disasters that threaten the very habitability of our planet, and near-constant social discord, here was my

daughter taking in the simple magnificence of nature and expressing her wonder and appreciation for the world around her. It occurred to me that despite her innocence, or perhaps because of it, she was right. The world really is a magical place, but too often we forget it.

I'll carry her words with me as I engage with clients across the nonprofit, government and corporate sectors. Hers is the lens through which we should all approach the work we do. To make an impact, you must believe that you can. I know it's hard to think that way amid the sheer volume of negativity we encounter every day—it's easy to become fatalistic. But as a communications professional, you can't just turn off the news. So how then can we manage the constant bombardment of negativity and believe that there's a better tomorrow around the corner?

It's with this question in mind that I want to highlight a recent conversation I had with **Regina Blye**, chief program and policy officer at the **Christopher & Dana Reeve Foundation**. Regina, who hails from Texas, sustained a spinal cord injury when she was just 10 years old after being shot in the neck by a stray bullet during a sleepover with her friends. The bullet that struck her more than 30 years ago has forced Regina to live virtually her entire life with quadriplegia. Nevertheless, Regina determined early on to make the most of her life and not let disability hinder her in any way—a lesson her parents, especially her mother, who stopped working to care for her, instilled.

How could someone so unfairly robbed at such a young age maintain a positive disposition about society and the broader world around her?

The world certainly seems a little less magical when you're confronted with such an injustice.

She's channeled her experience into a deep resolve to make things better for others who live with or are impacted by disability, staying laser-focused on inclusivity and effecting positive change.

She told me, “When it comes to inclusivity, I believe completely that people with disabilities are human beings. Sometimes that gets overlooked. People do not know unless they have someone in their life with a disability.”

So how do you turn that passion for activism into real-world change? As an organization, how do you communicate economic, environmental and social impact and create a stronger brand identity built on purpose and trust? It's a dilemma that many of my clients confront. They recognize the need and have the desire to get involved in a meaningful way to solve the pressing issues impacting their companies, employees and communities, but don't necessarily know how to move the needle.

Any nonprofit leader will tell you that it's a constant uphill battle. The odds are invariably stacked against you as you seek to raise your voice in advocacy for those who can't speak for themselves. Getting the attention of the media, the government or corporate entities can be daunting, and the competition for funding has never been more competitive.

From what we have seen, nonprofit leaders are increasingly inserting their point of view into the pressing issues of the day and proactively spotlighting the impact of their work. They know that one organization getting credit for social

advancement has the potential to create a ripple effect of greater funding and resources for the entire field. It takes persistence, fearlessness and an unwavering belief that it's worth fighting for the magic in the world. It takes optimism despite all the negativity that threatens to dispel it.

In the nonprofit and corporate worlds, there is a renewed focus on thought leadership in addition to executive visibility communications—two different but complementary approaches. Executive visibility is focused on being seen and heard through speaking engagements, media coverage and social media engagement. It's important, and any leader can do it, but is there a tangible impact on the triple bottom line?

When executives commit to a thought leadership platform, the investment in a consistent breakthrough narrative must be a priority, regardless of how long it might take to gain traction and resonate with stakeholders. It's critical to find a narrative that balances economic results and business priorities with a strong tie to societal value.

Ultimately, that's what Purpose and Social Impact work is all about and why I'm inspired daily by the remarkable people I work with across ESG, Corporate Reputation, Environment and DE&I. In our field, we amplify the voices struggling to be heard and the leadership voices who have the influence to drive lasting change.

As communications professionals, we need to stay focused on solving the problems in front of us and not creating more of them. We need to be unifying forces in an increasingly fractured world. We must operate with the firm belief that change is possible, even when things look bleak. Especially when things look bleak.

My daughter was right. The world is a magical place. We need to do a better job of recognizing and appreciating it when we see it. And we must fight for it, particularly now, when it seems like we could lose it forever.

(This article appeared in O'Dwyer's PR News)

SELF-EVALUATION AND COMMITMENT: KEYS TO CORPORATE REPUTATION

By: Amy Terpeluk
Managing Partner, CSR & Social Impact

It's largely understood in the corporate world that as issues of social justice, climate action, environmental justice and human rights move from page 12 to page 1 above the fold, if you haven't confronted or been impacted by these issues of societal import yet, you'll soon have to be.

After the Black Lives Matter movement exploded on the scene following George Floyd's tragic death, many companies were caught on the back foot. They had to take immediate action, evaluating their stances on diversity, equity and inclusion and critically, how they communicated about their successes or shortcomings. It's now an expectation.

Historically, the reverse has been true. Corporations saying nothing publicly in the face of political, social or economic upheaval has been acceptable—even expected—but that's not the world we live in any longer. These were ancillary concerns years ago; today, they're front and center. It's not a matter of if you'll be impacted, but when, and those who communicate positively and proactively are those who come out on top in the court of public opinion.

I'm a corporate reputation professional. My job is to ensure my clients put their best foot forward, telling the stories that will elevate leaders and organizational public standing. Believe me—it's better to be proactive than reactive and the "ostrich approach" to communications isn't sustainable.

I think that's broadly understood in the market. Everyone is doing some degree of reputational communications around purpose and social impact challenges. That in and of itself presents an interesting question: When everyone is doing it, how can you distinguish yourself? Ultimately, when everyone is doing perhaps 10 percent more than the historical baseline, those who do 50 percent more will stand out, and the public can tell when companies are just checking the box on CSR commitments.

It's critical to find the balance between compliance and communications.

Now more than ever, the worst thing that you can be as a leader is unprepared. If you haven't done a thorough self-evaluation to determine where and how issues may impact your business, you need to.

If you're a company that makes batteries for electric vehicles, your environmental record can be equally your greatest ally and most significant risk. Your operations may be beyond reproach, but how green is your supply chain? Are the vendors you work with as committed to getting to net zero as you are? Is someone in your C-suite driving a vehicle that gets 12 miles per gallon? It's easy to have blind

spots but having an honest conversation and shedding light on them will help you understand what a reputational risk might look like before it becomes one.

When you identify a problem internally, how quickly can you get out in front of it? Not every company has a sterling record on the issues that the public considers most pressing and communicating quickly, transparently and with contrition when appropriate. This isn't always easy or comfortable, but it separates those who weather the storm from those who fall victim to it.

Compliance is what you do because you must. Commitment is what you share with the world.

The Securities and Exchange Commission proposed rules recently that would institute more rigid ESG reporting requirements. Many firms went into retreat mode due to their legal counsel not fully having their arms around the implications or unintended consequences of the SEC's action. That largely stems from the next-to-impossible task of identifying what they can hang their hats on from a storytelling perspective without opening themselves up to reputational and regulatory risk. It is a struggle. They devote substantial resources to ESG reports, but it's challenging to move past the compliance stage and turn it into a commitment they can be proud of—and publicize.

You must answer the age-old question, "What do our stakeholders want to know?"

It isn't a simple answer in most cases. You're beholden to multiple stakeholders: investors, customers, employees, government and more, each with their priorities. As the saying goes, you can't be all things to everyone. You can tell your unique individual story in the best way you can, highlighting everything that makes your business unique and worthy of attention. Be open and honest about your challenges relative to how far you've come and still intend to go. Move beyond compliance and articulate commitment—as long as you're authentic.

An authentic and thoughtfully communicated mission is the way to win hearts and minds, and **convert that sentiment into an economic driver for your business** and myriad other benefits. There's always some degree of risk when you communicate out to the market about the good work that you do, but generally speaking, businesses that put themselves out there in that way are the ones who reap the rewards.

Communications can't be an afterthought. It has to be a core component of any purpose-based business strategy.

(This article appeared in O'Dwyer's PR News)

Corporate Reputation, Trust and Social Good: Practical Steps for Any Business

With the trust and credibility of leaders across public and private sectors constantly under scrutiny, how do communications professionals counsel their clients to strengthen the 'trust factor' of their corporate reputations?

By: Amy Terpeluk
Managing Partner, CSR & Social Impact

I've seen too many businesses shift their CSR priorities in response to the trending social issues of the day rather than aligning their social good initiatives with their core business in a way that drives positive impact while earning the trust and respect of all stakeholders.

Ultimately, it's about strengthening your position in the market as a leader on issues that matter while simultaneously bolstering your bottom line.

How can you strike that balance? Here are a few recommendations:

Every Community Counts

It has never been more important for business leaders to stay connected with the local communities where they operate.

This requires a deep understanding of your community's economic, cultural and societal concerns, gained by spending time listening to the very individuals you're seeking to help.

In doing so, you're advancing the goal of establishing your business as an authentic, reliable and trustworthy community steward.

It's like running for or holding public office—engage in some retail politics.

An integrated approach consistently involves community members in developing the social impact strategies and initiatives that will most benefit them.

The goal of companies might be to establish a long-term collaborative partnership with a community and in doing so, expand opportunities to build trust that will take root over time.

It's similar to building equity over time as a homeowner—there are no short-cuts. It requires a long-term vision and authentic, actionable initiatives.

Double Down on Impact

While most companies like to promote their most current social good initiatives, where are the stories about long-term societal change?

Who is holding companies accountable to make good on their promises over the long term?

As communications pros, we are part of the team that must help businesses convey positive impact through reputable measurement tools, and with consistency and transparency.

Too often companies learn the hard way that the public and other stakeholders are monitoring the progress they are making in regards to social good.

Failing to articulate, broadcast and reinforce the story of your positive impact not only erodes trust and credibility, but can cast a long shadow on a company's reputation. It can't be a one-off—you'll find the benefits compound over time.

Choose Your Partners Carefully

No single organization can solve a social issue on its own. It requires a network of business, nonprofit and community partners to achieve lasting change.

Companies must choose their partners in change carefully, and ensure they are committed to the same goals and principles.

New partners can bring resources to expand and amplify impact and open doors to new stakeholders that might have previously been inaccessible.

Companies might consider investing in long-term partnerships that can serve as social innovation incubators and build capacity for organizations receiving corporate support.

Keep in mind that developing relationships with like-minded organizations multiplies the impact that you can make and by extension, the trust that you build with your constituencies.

No one can predict the future, and the challenges corporations will have to confront from a reputational standpoint in the coming years will be immense.

That's a scary proposition, but you can act now to mitigate the risk that every business faces.

Scrutiny on issues of purpose, social impact, sustainability and diversity, equity, and inclusion will not decrease over time and if you're sitting on your hands now, hoping to ride it out, I've got some bad news for you.

No business is immune, but by doing good and uplifting the communities in which you operate, you can begin to craft your own story of effecting positive change, one that will stand the test of time.

(This article appeared in O'Dwyer's PR News)

THE POWER OF COALITIONS: CATALYSTS FOR CHANGE

By: Amy Terpeluk
Managing Partner, CSR & Social Impact

Nobody should work alone. It takes a village. Put your heads together.

By nature, we're not solitary creatures. We seek belonging, and a group of like-minded individuals who inspire, empower, educate, and safeguard us. It's been verified by millennia of evolution and learned experience, born out of necessity, but developing into a decided advantage in virtually every aspect of life.

Why then, is a particular brand of rugged individualism the norm in the business world? Competition trumps collaboration at nearly every turn, and to a certain extent, it's understandable. For some, business is a zero-sum game and there's a limited market of customers or clients to entice. It's about crushing the competition and winning, achieving higher levels of financial success at breakneck speed. In a capitalist system, we've come to accept that it's about survival of the fittest.

But what about when the goal isn't necessarily immediate profit or customer retention, but rather bolstering corporate reputation and making a difference in communities that your organization touches? This is when forming a team to tackle complex issues can be the most advantageous and meaningful.

Particularly for some of the clients I serve in the nonprofit realm, I've seen firsthand how powerful coalition building can be.

Nearly ten years ago, FINN Partners aligned with corporations, nonprofits, and government agencies to create **NO MORE**, the first unifying symbol for domestic violence and sexual assault awareness and prevention. NO MORE was not a formalized organization—it was a grassroots effort to support the life-changing and, in many cases, lifesaving work being done in the field. Only through a chorus of powerful voices could we begin to normalize conversations about issues that had been taboo topics for way too long. Today, this effort is now the NO MORE Foundation, a global movement encouraging people worldwide to be part of the solution to ending domestic violence and sexual assault.

If you're a nonprofit or a business outside the Fortune 500, the reality is that even if your social issue is worthy, your strategy is rock solid, and your commitment is genuine, you may not be able to effectively move the needle without a coalition of like-minded partners mobilized to combine forces. Sometimes the biggest problems require the most creative solutions and building a coalition—though potentially counterintuitive in a business environment that preaches “if you're not first, you're last”—might be just what you need to make an impact while effectively raising your profile.

The size of the coalition you build depends largely on the magnitude and scope of the problem you want to solve. If it's a hyper-local community effort, then it's only natural that you'd tap organizations in and around your own geographic footprint. Typically, the impact can be greater if you find partners that are truly invested and have a local interest in driving positive change.

In our experience, we have seen too many coalitions start out strong but lose momentum because there is no quantifiable goal. It's essential to work with coalition partners to develop clear goals and objectives that lead to real-world impact, and then track against the goals.

FINN has been fortunate to work with **NPower**, a leading nonprofit that helps individuals from under-resourced communities and veterans achieve greater economic mobility through tech jobs. They retained us almost three

years ago to help create and launch a coalition focused on increasing representation of women of color in the U.S. tech sector, **Command Shift: Accelerating More Women of Color in Tech**. An in-depth research project, The Equation for Equality: Women of Color in Tech, informed the coalition's goals and unveiled new strategies to achieve the coalition's mission.

Ultimately, the best thing you can do is get started, one way or another. Identify an issue where you can move the needle, then begin to think about what steps need to be taken to reach a solution that's meaningful. Consider then whether taking those steps will be easier and more impactful solo, or with a team behind you.

The answer is often self-evident.

(This article appeared in O'Dwyer's PR News)



HOW STRONG IS YOUR COMMUNITY?

By: Jeff Freedman
Managing Partner,
Integrated Marketing

The benefits of being a purposeful brand are almost infinite. But one that often gets overlooked is the ability to create a community around something bigger than your products themselves. In 2019, I wrote this post about Peloton, as an example of a brand that has created a community around a shared purpose.

Last week, as I was scrolling through my Facebook feed, I came across a sponsored ad from a law firm trying to recruit people to join them in a class action suit against Peloton.

From what I could gather, this firm noticed that Peloton had removed a few thousand of its older classes from its online library. They were trying to make the case that the promoted value of the subscription had declined, and members who bought the subscription prior to this event should receive retribution.

As a loyal member of the Peloton community, I never noticed the change. In my estimation, Peloton adds more than 100 new classes each week (almost all of which are first done live, then added into the library). At any given time, there are thousands of classes to choose from (not only cycling, but also stretching, floor work-outs, yoga, treadmill, and more). The lawsuit seemed a bit ridiculous to me, but then the hundreds of comments caught my eye:

Shawndra W wrote: "Clearly you know nothing about Peloton owners. We may sue you for this ridiculousness."

Jamie T wrote: "Fantastic! Consumers absolutely satisfied with a product and a lawyer trying to convince them to join this half-wit lawsuit. I'm placing my order today!"

This Facebook post—and even more so, the reactions to it—clearly demonstrate the power of a brand community - something that, in this day and age, all brands should be building and nurturing. That community becomes an essential part of the brand promise, adds value to the overall brand offering, and strengthens relationships with the audiences.

In my opinion, Peloton is one of the greatest current examples of a brand that thrives from its community. And while you could argue that it's because Peloton is in a unique position to build such a community, I challenge you to change your thinking and consider how your brand can do the same.

Here's a few tips on how:

1. Create "places" for users to connect and share with one another. I'm not just talking about a "brand page" on social media. Instead, consider creating a

place(s) where your audience(s) can engage with one another—online and/or in person. Peloton's member community on Facebook is a great example of this, but so are the events that they host around the world, where members have the opportunity to meet with one another.

2. Be the champion for your audience members. Most brands want their customers to be brand champions. But how about considering the opposite? Share their stories, acknowledge their successes, hang their photos on your walls, etc. When they feel your love for them, they will reciprocate accordingly.

3. Get others involved (not just the marketing team). While the brand marketing team may be responsible for building the community, they cannot (and should not) be the only ones engaged in it. The more everyone from your organization can get involved in the community (especially key executives, customer-facing individuals, and subject matter experts), the stronger your community will become. Every Peloton instructor is actively engaged in their community, participating in online conversations, attending events, and even sending out high-fives to riders while streaming their classes - and people love it.

4. Stand for something bigger than your products/services. While most members of your community are likely using your product(s) or service(s), recognize that there is likely a much larger purpose for their engagement. For example, Peloton members are seeking healthier lives. So, while there are surely conversations about the products/classes, there's even more about improving health in general. Encourage conversations accordingly. When the discussions are more about a greater purpose (and less about you), the community will become more engaged. What does your brand stand for?

5. Encourage constant feedback. One way to create a more engaged community (and a huge benefit of having one) is by actively soliciting feedback—in community spaces, within your product, via surveys, and more. Brands should not be afraid of negative feedback, but rather embrace it as an opportunity to learn and improve. Your community will appreciate you more for it.

A stronger community makes for a stronger (and more valuable) brand. I hope this post helps you strengthen yours—even if you don't need to fend off "ambulance chasers."

CHAPTER 2: DIVERSITY, EQUITY & INCLUSION

"Diversity, equity and inclusion is a part of life. It's a part of humanity and it is an essential element of any responsible organization. A diversity, equity and inclusion mindset is necessary in order to truly be successful. Diversity alone, without equity and inclusion, misses the point entirely. Marginalized communities need more than to be counted; they need real opportunity and intentional inclusion in the decisions and projects that matter. Elevating every voice that has struggled to be heard is central to any purpose-driven organization. FINN Partners has been committed to a culture that promotes diversity, equity and inclusion from day one. It's a founding pillar of the firm and matters deeply to us – and it literally guides our work at every level in service to our clients and to each other."

- Helen Shelton
Global Chief Diversity Officer

ELEVATING RACIAL EQUALITY REQUIRES A HOLISTIC ESG APPROACH

In response to the murder of George Floyd by police in late May, America has brought BIPOC (Black, Indigenous and people of color) issues front and center, with corporations speaking out in support of racial equality like never before. In addition, racial equality and economic disparity has become an increasingly important part of the COVID-19 discussion. As we head into August, companies must go beyond standalone Black Lives Matter statements and social media blackouts. To do this, they must begin implementing authentic and sustainable changes into their business strategy.

As the anti-racist movement, a global pandemic and ongoing environmental crises converge, it has become increasingly clear that environmental and governance issues are also social issues. As governments, NGOs and activists navigate solutions, it is also critical that businesses reassess how to create financial value while also utilizing their business to generate social value.

Racial equality is a vital part of ESG

ESG (environmental, social, governance) performance is the core of responsible business. It is also a powerful business driver that builds resiliency. In fact, [research from BlackRock](#) suggests a majority of ESG-focused investment portfolios have outperformed non-sustainable counterparts during the coronavirus-driven downturn – and the investment giant is even going so far to [vote against management](#) in companies in which it has invested.

By: Helen Shelton
Global Chief Diversity
Officer

This article on what companies can do to improve on their racial equality performance was written with Jane P. Madden.

My colleague, Jane Madden (Managing Partner, Global Sustainability & Social Impact Practice Leader at FINN Partners), [shares](#) it has always been a best practice that ESG be approached in an interdisciplinary manner and reflect the mission and core values of the company. But as we see the silos of ESG break down even further, companies need to look at ESG through an integrated and holistic lens.

For example, recent anti-racism protests have put environmental justice [in the spotlight](#), as activists reconnect the social justice movement with the disproportionate number of people of color and the poor who live and work in places with degraded environmental quality (both an “E” and an “S” issue). “The lack of corporate board diversity and management (generally a “G” issue) limits benefits realized from diverse points of view, but it has also played a large role in socio-economic disparities across the country,” Jane says. “Furthermore, sustainability leaders need to own past discrimination and integrate anti-racism into the discipline. They can no longer look at the E, S or G as stand-alone issues.”

Public health, systemic racism and fostering more diverse and inclusive workplaces are very complicated. These challenges and their solutions must not be over simplified. There are several principle-based actions companies can take to ensure better incorporation of ESG to create a more equitable, resilient, and social-positive business.

Five actions businesses can take to secure racial equality

Go Beyond the Pledge. Commitments to racial equality need to be supported by measurable actions. Companies who have made statements of solidarity with Black Lives Matter and other organizations, but who do not have diverse hiring or labor practices, have been [rightly criticized](#). Companies that strive to improve performance need to own past behavior and be open about their challenges. Most importantly, they need to take thoughtful actions that will have lasting impact by creating a more diverse, inclusive and equitable workplace.

Be transparent. The foundation to any ESG strategy is transparency. As the world and the markets rapidly shift, companies need to be transparent in their commitments and honest and modest about their actions and achievements, particularly when it comes to BIPOC employees and communities, to earn trust.

Activate diversity competency. According to [Black Enterprise](#), 187 S&P 500 companies (37 percent) did not have a single Black board member in 2019. Critical diversity and inclusion initiatives should expand to include DE&I competency, especially at the board and management

level. Just as climate leaders called for “climate competency” on corporate boards several years ago, we need to build “diversity competency” on corporate boards. Implementing new policies and actions, including: the hiring and wage equity practices; ensuring that the talent pipeline includes historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs), Black and minority student groups and alumni associations; and linking management performance to diversity, equity and inclusion outcomes, will strengthen the business. They will also add long-term value from new talent and a more inclusive corporate culture. More diverse and culturally inclusive workplaces can also help systematically address the wealth gap for BIPOC employees.

Think and act local. Engaging with local community groups is a critical piece of developing and implementing any business strategy. While national or multinational organizations provide expertise and scale for certain issues, going local should, at the very least, be carefully considered as part of any strategic engagement. This may mean partnering with local organizations to advise on hiring practices or identifying business partners who can help achieve business and communication goals through a thoughtful social impact lens.

Donations are necessary but not sufficient. There will always be a critical role for corporate donations, but it does not replace rethinking and changing your business model from hiring to marketing to products and services. One-time donations, while welcome, may not always make the intended impact. Reactionary contributions made in the name of racial equality can come off as disingenuous, especially if the cause does not align with the company’s core values or is contrary to its actions. Utilizing the company’s core business competencies, employee skills and resources, and implementing long-term impact investments, can create more equitable and resilient economies and communities, and better meet employees’ values and their own growth objectives. These same actions strengthen trust and loyalty and can develop talent and customer pipelines. Use the power of your corporate purse in another way – support and integrate Black-owned businesses into your supply chain.

Corporate sustainability is not a zero-sum game. The rise of social issues, including racial equality, does not diminish the importance of environmental issues. All must be addressed. To be effective and meet ESG performance goals, environment, social and governance issues must be considered holistically and be integrated into business strategy.

(This article appeared in Triple Pundit)



FINDING JOY AMIDST ADVERSITY

By: Jeff Freedman
Managing Partner,
Integrated Marketing

In March of 2021, after several nationally-reported racist attacks (the most recent having been the killing of six Asian women in Georgia), I shared thoughts from “The Book of Joy,” an incredibly inspiring book from The Dalai Lama and Archbishop Desmond Tutu. Despite both of their histories, their views on life, friendship and joy were refreshing. I encourage you to read the book. But, in the meantime, enjoy the post.

Last week, while the nation was dealing with yet another horrific act of racial violence, I was in the middle of reading “The Book of Joy” by The Dalai Lama and Archbishop Desmond Tutu. While just the thought of joy could seem ignorant and counter-intuitive in light of the current state of adversity in this country and around the world, I found the lessons and guidance from these two spiritual leaders extremely comforting as I personally grappled with my own thoughts and emotions around these most recent events.

To put it in perspective, these two wise men have been dealing with great adversity for most of their lives. The Dalai Lama has been living in exile from his homeland of Tibet for more than 50 years, while the Archbishop fought against apartheid for the majority of his life. They have not only witnessed great pain, tragedy and adversity, they have personally experienced it. Hearing these two men speak on the virtues of humanity, the power of compassion and the joy of life was enlightening and up-lifting. While I encourage everyone to read this book, below here are a few of the lessons I found most relevant and inspiring for these times:

1. We are all part of one community. We often define ourselves by race, religion, gender or other

factors. However, such descriptors only serve to highlight our differences among one another. Instead, we must start by viewing ourselves as all part of the same community. One tribe ties us all together: humanity.

2. We find the greatest joy through compassion. While empathy helps us understand others' challenges, compassion is the act of doing something about it. As we give of ourselves, we not only give joy to others, but receive joy from doing so - and create even more “space” for joy in our own hearts and lives.

3. Do not react. Respond. The difference could be as tiny as one second. We tend to quickly react to words and actions based on preconceived thoughts, notions and assumptions. But, if we just take a moment to

reconsider the “why” and try to better understand the root of the words/actions, we can respond in a more rational, positive and productive way. Often times, the “why” stems from a perspective, upbringing, background or other education that was different from our own. Seek to understand and educate.

4. Humor and humility are key ingredients to joy. I was surprised by the amount of joking and laughing from these two religious and spiritual leaders, as they teased one another and showed humility around others, even with their revered status. These characteristics ground us and provide the perspective necessary to experience joy. It is not a coincidence that both of these words (and the word, “humanity”) are based on the latin root “hum” which literally means “ground.”

5. Forgiveness frees us from anger. Forgiveness may be the most difficult thing to do, but is also the most freeing. The Dalai Lama and Archbishop not only forgive those who have harmed them, but also pray for their joy. This does not mean that they condone the behavior but, rather, they recognize that it comes from a place of anger and/or ignorance, and believe that it

is more important to help their aggressors overcome those obstacles than to let the anger and resentment linger forever (and prevent joy within themselves).

As we think about the violence, suffering and adversity in the world around us, it is difficult to imagine how we can experience joy amidst it all. But the words and lessons from these two leaders has given me hope and guidance. One of the greatest themes of the book acknowledges that joy depends upon adversity. These struggles are what enable us to show compassion, recognize inequities and, ultimately, bring greater peace and joy to our lives. We may never reach Nirvana, but we will continue to get better. Humanity will win.

CHAPTER 3: EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

“Corporate reputation isn’t only external. More and more, employees and candidates are looking to the companies they work for to take a stand on issues that matter. Good words and good deeds that aren’t communicated to these key stakeholders are a wasted opportunity. At every level of an organization, an aligned, engaged workforce is a competitive advantage. By leading and communicating with purpose, corporate leaders will find their teams rallying to the cause.”

- Betsy Henning
Managing Partner, Global
Employee Engagement Practice Lead

By: Betsy Henning
Managing Partner, Global Employee
Engagement Practice Lead

EMPLOYEE TRUST — 4 WAYS TO MAINTAIN PROGRESS MADE DURING THE PANDEMIC

Trust is likely flourishing in all sorts of new ways in your company.

You may be about to kill it.

Please don't do that. Please don't use the phrase "new normal" as if it's some weak compromise you'll have to live with. Please don't talk to your employees about "getting back to normal" as if that's the ultimate goal everyone is seeking. Please don't assume that the pre-pandemic way you built ideas and relationships — within teams and with clients — was somehow optimal, ideal, and loved by all.

I understand it's easy to get wistful about those "good old days" from a couple years ago. But it's not as if the pandemic suddenly cratered. We've been talking about that crisis since long before COVID. A pre-pandemic PwC survey of global CEOs revealed more than half saw a lack of trust was a direct threat to their organization's growth.

Yes, we were forced to scatter our people, go virtual, scramble to create new systems, struggle to accomplish even day-to-day tasks we all took for granted. There is a power in the simple act of us all working together in person, every day, and being exposed to the culture in every break room, hallway and activity. We can appreciate that now more than ever.

Yet in that environment of constant new challenges and compromises, people did rise to the occasion. Problems met with rapid solutions. The trust-killer of micromanaging become almost impossible. Clients, once seen primarily in formal meeting rooms, had to be more vulnerable, as meetings held from their homes forced them to let their

agencies into their lives in new ways, leading to the kind of human connection that opens doors to higher trust and understanding.

And like it or not, all of us had to reexamine ourselves. What we feared. What made us happy. How we managed our time. How we prioritized. How we balanced our personal and work lives. How we best collaborated and succeeded. How we could earn and give trust. As we move into the future, we must not let this hard-won knowledge be diminished by suddenly losing our momentum in discussions of "how quickly can we all get back to normal."

Today, we face the fundamental challenge perfectly captured in a 2021 study from Buck Global showing 58% of employees do not trust senior management to look out for their best interests and that 42% believing their leadership is out of touch with the reality workers have experienced during the pandemic. It's a reality that should give us all pause. But we can also pair this with the positive implications of research conducted by Paul Zak, the founding director of the Center for Neuroeconomics Studies, which found employees in high-trust companies reported 50% higher productivity, 76% more engagement, 40% less burnout and more than double the energy they bring to their jobs compared to workers in low-trust organizations. It is clear. The trust lacking today is a giant obstacle, but trust gained moving forward can be a game-changing multiplier.

Yes, we are all tired now from these past years. But we are also stronger in our understanding of what makes a great manager, a great team, a great relationship, a great company. How well we emerge from these past years may come down to how we hold ourselves to a trust-building standard. I think there are a few key areas that need close attention.

First, ask yourself if your internal debate on when and how much in-person work will return is dominated by managers prioritizing to make managing easier? And, with that, how many of your virtual workers have been able to weigh-in specifically on the benefits of virtual they now see as keys to their ability to excel? You almost certainly have employees who have flourished these past years, often through great effort on their part that they are proud of. Marking those times as an aberration can send a powerful negative message you didn't intend.

Ask yourself if you've accepted that building trust by "being there for your employees" has changed. It means more proactive efforts to touch base with each employee more consistently. It means actively seeking out problems to address them earlier. It means taking a hard look at your managers' workloads to give them true time in their schedules to make that happen. It means making sure your company culture allows managers to show the kind of personal vulnerability to their teams that is such a core component of building rapport.

Are you doing all you can to build rapid trust as a natural part of how you share news and plans with your employees? So often, companies craft a benefit or positive change with the intention of helping employees, and then are surprised when those well-meaning efforts are met with employee skepticism, indifference, even scorn. What went wrong?

It may simply have been that the benefit or change was described and touted, but the conversation stopped there.

Sure, it was good news, but it was one-way. Missing from the sharing was the simple step of connecting the description of the effort with the intention that drove that decision. It shouldn't just be "great news; we've decided to offer daycare

services three days a week." You'll serve your employees, and your goals, far better with an approach closer to "we've been thinking of ways to help our working parents participate more easily in our collaborations at the office; one suggestion we're going to be testing is providing daycare services three days a week."

Now the employees understand from the start the underlying care, thinking and motive behind the move. It feels closer to a dialogue, one they can enter with honest comments on what is being tested, and why it is being done. Almost immediately, you've rapidly opened up the conversation in ways that alignment can happen and trust can flow – in both directions.

And finally, from a top level, have you streamlined how you convey the purpose of your company's mission and the strategy you use to get there? How many convoluted mission statements have you rolled your eyes at over the years? We laugh. But no company can afford that lack of clarity anymore. Use this time as a moment you streamline how you explain to your own people and the world what your company is specifically aspiring to and how all can be involved. To have your promises trusted, you must first make those promises clear, relevant and actionable.

We stand at a launching point where the solutions, bonds and trust built throughout these challenging times can be seen for what they truly are – an opportunity for every company to become its better self – trusted in the eyes of the world, their clients and, most importantly, the employees who are the true beating heart of every company, every brand.

It could be the biggest, most lasting win you have ever achieved.

(This article appeared in Ad Age)

Purpose and Social Impact as Differentiators in the Job Market

By: Cullen Burnell
Vice President, Chief of Staff Health and Purpose

In 2022, when college graduates enter the job market for the first time, the highest-performing, most attractive candidates have options that may not have been historically available. Suppose a Cal Tech artificial intelligence and machine learning student surveys their options post-graduation. They're likely to find that their skillset and educational profile are in extremely high demand and there is no shortage of start-ups, big tech, or financial services firms lining up with job offers.

The story is the same regardless of industry or area of expertise: the competition for the highest performers with the most desirable skillset is fierce. The reason is apparent, but the difference between a high performer and others is significantly starker than you might think.

A 2017 McKinsey study found that high performers are a staggering 800% more productive than even average performers in highly complex and interaction-intensive roles – software developers or project managers, for example. It's a figure so prominent that it looks like a typo.

These high-performing business professionals from all walks of life can be found everywhere. They have various skills and educational backgrounds, making them attractive candidates for roles up and down the corporate ladder. Over time, the competitiveness of the job market has tended to skew in employers' favor when hiring, but it's clear that the pendulum has begun to swing in the other direction—or, at least, the equation is more balanced than it's historically been.

I've heard senior executives lament that their brightest young team members leave for other organizations, that loyalty is nonexistent, and that these up-and-comers are just corporate mercenaries willing to work for whoever pays more and offers the best perks. There's certainly a kernel of truth in that.

People with business-critical or difficult-to-find skills and expertise are increasingly in the driver's seat as top firms compete for top talent. The reality is that the differences in compensation, benefits, and perks between Apple and Google or Goldman Sachs and JP Morgan Chase are

typically minimal. Suppose one company offers a candidate a base salary, bonus, and benefits that are only marginally different from the offer another organization puts on the table. What will that candidate base their decision on?

The differentiating factor is often the alignment between the candidate's values and the stated purpose and mission of the organization relative to competitors. Per McKinsey survey data, 70% of employees tend to define their sense of purpose at work, meaning that organizations that allow their team members to define and express their values and intent on the job have a leg up on the competition.

A PwC survey of job candidates found that 71% of job seekers rate employer reputation as more important than the corporate brand when considering a new role. The same study reported that 72% of C-suite job seekers were more likely to apply for a position with an organization openly committed to improving their workforce's diversity and inclusion.

So what can the conscientious organization do to attract and – critically – retain the best talent?

1. Define and communicate your organizational purpose. FINN Partners was founded on purpose by our CEO, Peter Finn. His vision was of an organization defined by its commitment to make a difference in the world and, and that's what he's built. There's a reason why FINN Partners was recently shortlisted for 12 PRWeek Purpose awards, including Purpose Agency of the Year and Most Purposeful Agency Professional for Peter himself. We don't obscure our values or how they inform our business practices and the clients we take on—quite the opposite. As a result, we tend to attract like-minded people to join our ranks, building our capabilities and a thriving community.

It's a model that other organizations can follow; lean into and articulate the thinking behind your corporate purpose, social impact, environmental responsibility, and diversity, equity, and inclusion commitments. Be open during the recruitment process and present it as part of the whole package should a candidate accept your offer.

2. Encourage employees to find and express purpose during working hours. The same McKinsey study referenced earlier found that 63% of people surveyed want their employer to provide more opportunities for purpose in their day-to-day work. In truth, that takes a little bit of bravery. It's not always easy to encourage the free expression of ideas and values at work. By their very nature, workplaces are environments where diverse ideologies must coexist.

Because expressing personally held beliefs may risk upheaval or create some discomfort, the temptation might be to encourage people to participate in

championing causes they support outside of working hours. However, it's far more powerful when organizations commit to finding opportunities during the 9-5 grind for people to do meaningful work and have purpose-based conversations. That's when employees feel most heard and most able to contribute to societal good.

3. Get management buy-in and stick with it. Directives from the C-suite are critical. They set the tone for the entire organization. However, without buy-in from frontline managers, director-level employees, and others in day-to-day team leadership positions, even the most committed CEO will find that their organization isn't delivering on purpose-driven initiatives. It requires constant employee engagement and communication, not only about why it's a moral imperative to engage on societal and environmental import issues but also why it's an economically sound business strategy.

As my colleague Betsy Henning, managing partner and Employee Engagement Practice Lead at FINN Partners, put it, "When people feel heard, they know they matter, and then they roll up their sleeves. But you can see that the onus is on managers to set the tone."

We face the fundamental challenge perfectly captured in a 2021 study showing 58% of employees do not trust senior management to look out for their best interests and that 42% believe their leadership is out of touch with the reality workers have experienced during the pandemic. It's a reality that should give us all pause.

But we can also pair this with the positive implications of research conducted by Paul Zak, the founding director of the Center for Neuroeconomics Studies, which found employees in high-trust companies reported 50% higher productivity, 76% more engagement, 40% less burnout, and more than double the energy they bring to their jobs compared to workers in low-trust organizations. It is clear. The trust lacking today is a giant obstacle, but trust gained moving forward can be a game-changing multiplier.

When managers understand the dual benefits of tangible societal impact and improved economic viability for the purpose-based organization, they're more likely to champion the C-suite's priorities across and through the company.

The market for top talent is more competitive than ever, and organizations can't afford to leave any stone unturned as they seek to attract the best and brightest. Offering a competitive salary, solid benefits, and attractive perks are expected. When companies lean into purpose and social impact, that's where real differentiation is possible and where purpose-driven firms distinguish themselves. Give people an opportunity to make a difference in the world. Help them leave a lasting impact. You'll be rewarded.



VALUE PROPOSITIONS AREN'T JUST FOR CUSTOMERS

By: Rod Alexander
Senior Partner,
Employee Engagement

The challenge of finding—and retaining—talented workers for just about every industry has been an issue for many years. And now it's getting worse.

Why? Lots of reasons. Let's start with COVID, but let's not forget inflation, political upheaval, climate change, social unrest, the war in Ukraine and overall economic instability sparked by fears of a recession.

The question of how to address the talent issues is exacerbated by all these obstacles, and companies are searching for answers. I believe one way to address it that might provide some answers is to look at the Employee Value Proposition (EVP), a popular HR tool that companies in almost all industries have been using in some form for years.

The time is right not only to revisit the EVP, but perhaps to completely rewrite it so that it meets the unique challenges posed by an ever-changing post-pandemic workplace.

What is an EVP? Definitions vary significantly in their details, but most contain similar basic elements. At its core, an EVP is a way for companies to market themselves to potential employees by highlighting their mission, values, culture, and overall benefits, beyond simple remuneration.

Why is an EVP revaluation needed? For one thing, business leaders and employers everywhere need to understand that the COVID pandemic has changed everything. The way we used to do business before March 2020 is never coming back. Anyone who rejects that reality does so at their own peril.

The most obvious change falls under the umbrella heading of employee expectations. When it comes to hiring, the shoe is now on the other foot, and employees (as well as prospects) hold more clout and leverage than ever before. And that's not going to change, even if we do enter a recession. Keep in mind that despite economic uncertainty, U.S. unemployment is at an extremely low 3.5%, according to the [U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics](#).

Employees want more flexible working hours, new benefits such as childcare and expanded work-from-home opportunities. They also want to work for companies that demonstrate a genuine stake in—excuse the cliché—making the world a better place. Many employees want to work within a corporate culture that is compatible with their beliefs and allows them to flourish doing work that is personally important to them.

Author, TED speaker and futurist Jacob Morgan has a great quote that sums it up well:

“In a world where money is no longer the primary motivating factor for employees, focusing on the [employee experience](#) is the most promising competitive advantage that organizations can create.”

Here are several suggestions for how employers can create a new version of an EVP that meets the challenges created by a new, post-pandemic working environment.

- Make sure that every level of corporate management, from the CEO down to the lowest level of employee manager, endorses your EVP. Otherwise, it will lack credibility. Employees will see through it and view it as mere lip service.
- Make your EVP genuinely actionable. As my [AHA colleague](#) and senior strategist Brian Lanahan says, “Any genuine EVP has to come off the walls and into the halls.” If it doesn't, the workforce will see it as a paper tiger.
- When reviewing and revising an EVP, seek input from a cross-section of employees. It's essential that a credible and forceful EVP include grassroots input. That way, the workforce will know they have skin in the game. A truly effective EVP needs to articulate the beliefs and desires of the people it will impact the most.
- Ensure that your EVP benefits both sides. You don't need to sacrifice everything to your workers. Just make sure they know you are sincere in your efforts to develop a plan that works for everyone.
- Merge your revamped EVP into an overall corporate campaign strategy that describes how it would work in real terms. Create messages for employees and a tagline for the overall program.
- Make it clear that your EVP is fluid and evolving. Employees need to be reassured that the EVP will be regularly re-evaluated to reflect what they want and need.
- View your employees as the foundation for success and treat them accordingly.

An EVP can work for employers and employees alike, but it needs to honestly and forcefully address the needs of a new generation of workers who simply don't view the world the same way we did before the pandemic. The world has changed, and any employer who wants to succeed needs to ride the change or risk losing out. The best way is to create a new blueprint for hiring and retaining talent that realistically meets the needs of employees who are living and working in an ever-changing, post-pandemic marketplace.

(This article appeared in MediaPost)



5 WAYS TO IMPROVE EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT IN 2023

By: Betsy Henning
Managing Partner, Global Employee
Engagement Practice Lead

UPSKILLING, FLEXIBILITY AND LISTENING ARE PART OF THE NEW PLAYBOOK

Would you put up with a computer that only works a third of the time? Would your C-suite be satisfied if your sales team worked only on Tuesdays and a half day on Friday? Would you keep a supplier that only kept its factories running 10 days a month?

Of course not.

Yet, when it comes to employee engagement, many companies accept similar results as the norm. Since 2000, the share of employees Gallup considers “engaged” at work has never topped 36 percent. This amounts to a fairly lackluster performance from leaders and investors who often patronizingly call employees “our most valuable asset.”

Today, however, we’re in the midst of a global shakeup sparked by a handful of factors that has the potential to reshape the employee/employer relationship and rewrite the rules of employee engagement. These factors include the pandemic, social unrest, racial reckoning and historically low unemployment matched by historically high job growth. Additional considerations such as hybrid work and mental health awareness result in calls for equity and inclusion that can’t be ignored.

The workplace of the future is going to take years to sort out, but one thing is certain: In the short-term, companies can’t afford complacency. That’s why 2023—in spite of the ongoing uncertainty—could be an exciting year for employee engagement. Here are five predictions for what’s ahead.

1. Upskilling and reskilling will swing into high gear.

In 2022, job seekers ranked career development as one of their top needs. That’s not likely to change in 2023. With quit rates high and talent attraction more competitive than ever, companies will look beyond low-cost, off-the-shelf upskilling offerings. Providing career-enhancing training and education opportunities to employees proves they’re valued and worthy of investment.

2. The people-person manager will rise.

An employee’s relationship with their manager is critical to how they feel about a job—and whether they stay. Today’s pandemic-weary workers want managers who can understand and support them as humans, not just as employees. Look for companies to hire and train managers for so-called soft skills like empathy and understanding. It’s a human-forward approach that also will show up in communications, branding, and employee experiences. And don’t underestimate the power of positivity. “Great managers help colleagues learn and grow, recognize their colleagues for doing great work, and make them truly feel cared about. In environments like this, workers thrive,” according to Gartner.

3. Companies will write a new playbook for building culture.

For some employees, remote work has been a godsend, providing freedom from microaggressions and petty politics. For others, it’s the worst; it’s isolating with too many temptations to quietly quit. How will companies build (or rebuild) strong cultures and strong connections among team members in dispersed environments? There’s no playbook for how to do it, which is why we’re likely to see a lot of

innovation and experimentation in 2023. There’s one thing we all can agree on: out with the Zoom happy hours and in with meaningful connections. Look for the rise in mentoring programs, onboarding, and new-hire team-building activities.

4. Flexibility will be the new normal (at some companies).

With team members working across time zones and even continents, the old container of 40 firmly set hours, keyed to a specific time zone, with inflexible expectations about availability is just out of touch with the times. Many workers value—and actively seek—flexibility over rigidity in their employers. Even as some companies demand a return to the office, many others will embrace asynchronous work and find new ways for employees to work on different days and in different ways to achieve great things together. This is harder to systematize, of course. But that’s where adaptive, human-centric leadership comes in, and in 2023, we’ll see more of it.

5. Expect to set expectations.

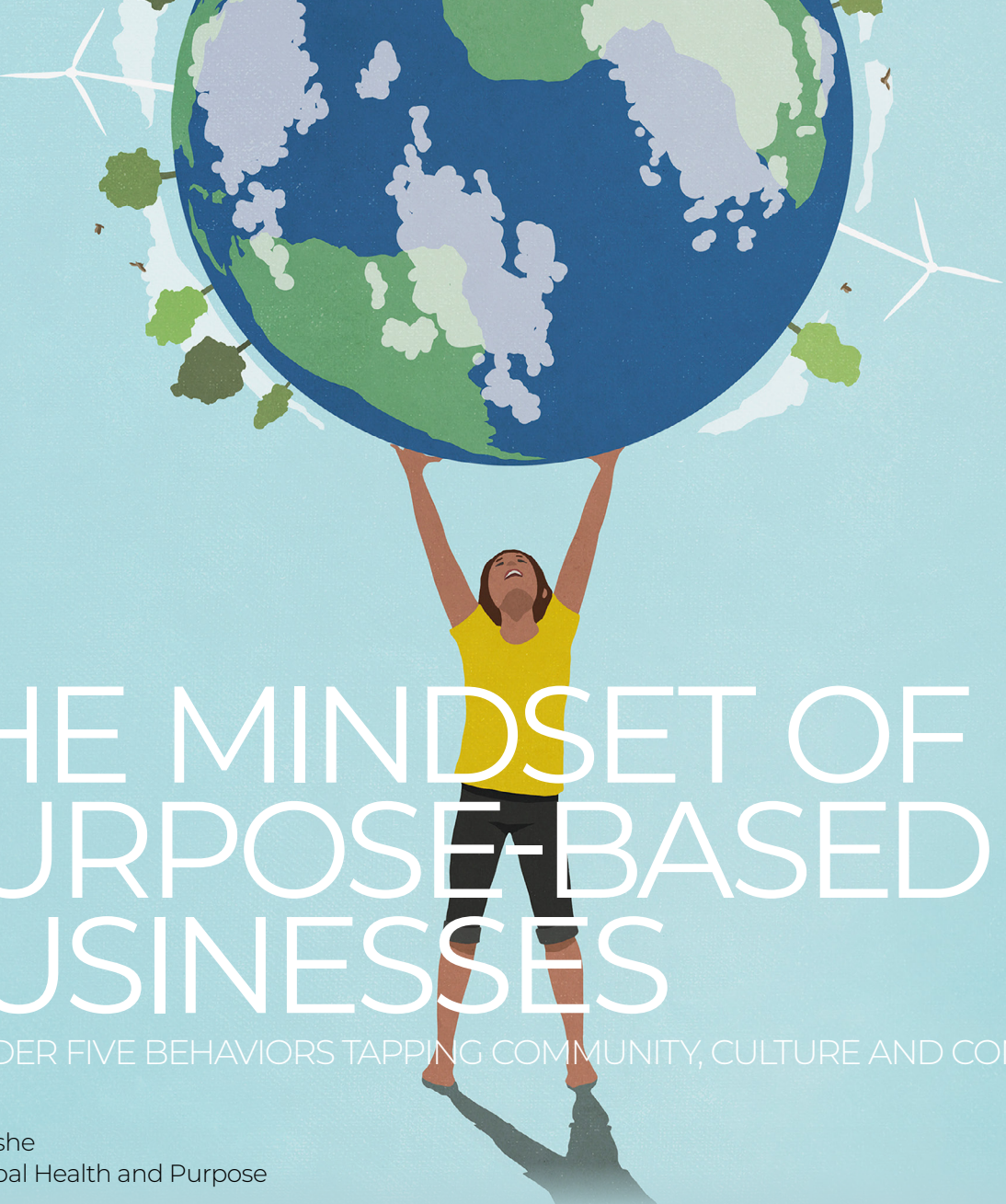
The key to avoiding disappointments is aligning on expectations, clearing the way for everything from work/life balance to success measures and timing for that next promotion.

Beleaguered managers, and their teams, will all be better served by updated job descriptions, SMART goals, and regular check-ins. Look for an increase in trainings, tools and requests from HR and your new hires to commit to job clarity, performance metrics, and defined career maps.

To the extent it’s all served up by one of the emerging online performance management tools, all the better for transparency and accountability.

The events of the past three years have torn asunder the workaday world that gave form and structure to our lives. Today, we’re in a rebuilding phase, one where workers demand better from their employers. Companies will do well to listen. At the end of the day, employee engagement is about meeting employees where they are. Companies that show they care about workers will have the edge. Luckily, many companies are doing just that, finding new ways to value employee well-being. They’re demonstrating that trying new ways of working, even when imperfect, can yield success. For workers, that’s good news. For the year ahead, I hope for the best.

(This article appeared in Ad Age)



THE MINDSET OF PURPOSE-BASED BUSINESSES

CONSIDER FIVE BEHAVIORS TAPPING COMMUNITY, CULTURE AND CONSISTENCY

By: Gil Bashe
Chair Global Health and Purpose

In the shadow of the great resignation, leaders are now waking up to the long-standing reality that talented people serve as “paid volunteers,” and the paycheck alone doesn’t hold them to the job as it did in previous generations. Leaders must recognize that the best talent knows it can go anywhere. Purpose and a sense of belonging, along with a paycheck, motivate good people to remain and sustain amazing communities.

Jim Collins, who penned the leadership classic *Good to Great*, suggested businesses adopt a BHAG, the acronym for “Big Hairy Audacious Goal.” While Collins had extraordinary business performance in mind when he thought of BHAGs, it’s clear today that employees, whether at corporations or non-governmental organizations, want their leaders to be bold and rally them toward a purpose that achieves a greater good.

Pressing Problems Cannot Be Ignored.

Around the globe, we face pressing population health challenges. Non-communicable conditions like cancer, cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and mental health issues become more common and continue their destructive trajectories. To add to the dangers, some 16 million Americans – the most vulnerable – may soon be without **Medicaid-related health coverage** when COVID emergency coverage comes to an abrupt end.

As a result, our medical system may soon be overwhelmed by the public health and access-to-care burdens society will soon face. Providers, payers, patients, and product health communications within the health ecosystem must recognize that the collaborative search for solutions is in everyone’s best interests.

Climate change is also putting our health at risk. The increase in floods, drought, extreme heat, wildfires and hurricanes could cost the American economy \$2

trillion a year by the end of the century, according to the **Office of Management and Budget** – that is a 7.1% hit to earning power. We have yet to come to terms with the reality that our health and the well-being of future generations are dependent on the earth’s ability to sustain us.

People Seek and Want Deeper Connection.

We cannot tackle climate change alone, nor can we overcome and discover cures for disease as individuals. Businesses can make a big contribution here, effecting change and providing the purpose that employees increasingly seek. Leaders have the opportunity to drive collective action that engages their employees, rallying them to work together toward something more meaningful than their daily punch list alone.

Companies are organized and geared toward selling products and services for profit. Their leaders are in turn measured by return on investment and shareholder value. While they pursue organizational goals, companies must consider how they align business interests to social issues no longer hidden from sight. By doing so, they create stronger market relevance by bonding with their employees and customers and supporting policymakers who define the business environment in which they operate. Purpose is a win-win proposition.

Here are five important considerations – mindsets – for creating communities of purpose that can enable leaders to rally their people to take on shared societal challenges:

1. Cultivate Collaboration.

Organizations often set out to construct identities for themselves, but it’s not marketing that makes a company significant, it’s shared values. The test of a culture is how willing your people are to put everything aside during adversity and ask, “How can I help, and what do you need?” That culture of collaboration creates the

mindset that together, everything is possible. Collins recognizes President Kennedy’s call to action to land a man on the moon as a spur that required American engineers, mathematicians, and computer and medical scientists to collaborate to succeed.

2. Abolish CYA (Cover Your) ...Behavior.

Who among us hasn’t had an experience with a coach, manager, or leader who used blame, shame, and threats to motivate? It might work for a short time, but it’s abusive and wrong. The result is a CYA culture in which no one takes risks, and people become experts in not having the finger pointed at them. No one does outstanding work; even the organization’s stars don’t stick around long.

Influential leaders don’t waste time looking to blame. They seek to understand, share learnings, demonstrate empathy, and get people back on track. While punitive leadership buries progress and purpose, an enduring commitment to creating the best possible place to work opens people to dreaming, thinking, and working big.

3. Be a Learning Organization.

So, you made a mistake. Don’t feel intimidated or upset; share what you’ve learned. The greatest thing we can do to foster knowledge is to share information. We are all each other’s teachers, and in sharing successes and failures equally, we make a higher level of achievement possible. In learning organizations, people feel valued because their risks are rewarded, they’re supported emotionally and elevated professionally, resulting in heightened performance levels.

4. Form a More Perfect Union through Diversity.

An engaged workforce is a key business driver. Conversely, Gallup has estimated that the cost of disengagement—in the form of turnover, low productivity, and low

morale, can come at the expense of 18% of salary. In a community with a strong culture dedicated to a shared vision, we must have many “on the bus;” as Collins has suggested, we want to make sure that everyone finds the right seat, doing what they do better than anyone else.

To rise toward perfection, we want to attain and stay true to the culture we seek to form. Diversity, equity, and inclusion are requirements for communities to thrive. Leaders must tap varied life perspectives to enable people to drive forward together.

5. Align Doing Well and Doing Good.

It is arduous to sustain a company if business fundamentals aren’t prioritized. But if it’s only about a business’s performance, for employees, work becomes “time to make the donuts,” and after the newness rubs off, it loses meaning. Purpose does not require companies to abandon business goals. It does not mean that effective production or service is secondary to “doing good.” If a company has strong business fundamentals in place and aligns them with goals for sustainability or social impact, it is likely to perform consistently better.

Careers provide us with employment and a secure paycheck, but is that enough to sustain body, planet, and soul? During his short yet powerful life, philosopher and poet Kahlil Gibran wrote: “To understand the heart and mind, look not at what he has already achieved, but what he aspires to.”

Communities united in purpose achieve results; this is the next challenge for business leaders. To create and foster high-performing employee communities, business leaders must align their people, head and heart, with greater purpose. That is a BHAG worthy of aspiring to.

(This article appeared in Medika Life)

CHAPTER 4: ENVIRONMENT & SUSTAINABILITY

"The planet is in crisis, and we need to take decisive action now if we're going to avoid the worst outcomes. Corporations are increasingly recognizing the role they have to play and the immense difference they can make by leading the fight. We'll need companies of every size and in every industry working together to make the kind of seismic changes that will secure a healthy future for the planet, and I'm optimistic that we have the will and the ability to do just that."

- Bob Martineau
Senior Partner, Environmental Policy
and Communications

COMMUNICATION: THE MISSING LINK BETWEEN VISION AND PROGRESS ON ENVIRONMENT AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY PRIORITIES

By: Bob Martineau
Senior Partner, Environmental Policy
and Communications

There's no ignoring the impact of climate change on our world.

We watch the news. We see reports of record-setting temperatures and other extreme weather events leading to the destruction of property and worse.

We're faced with a tilted Supreme Court that rolled back decades of critical social justice, medical, and environmental protection. Our politics are paralyzed by inaction. One political party seeks to strangle American democracy; the other is seemingly incapable of responding adequately to the magnitude of the danger facing government.

Surrounded by this kind of negativity, perhaps despair and hopelessness are reasonable reactions. How can we hope to effect positive change and confront the threats to our vision for a better future in this environment? I'm here to tell you that there is reason for optimism.

Even though circumstances appear dire, we're starting to see leadership from a rather unlikely hero: Corporate America. Many companies are pivoting their positioning on corporate purpose to champion solutions for the most pressing concerns we face. They define their mission in terms of profit, purpose and social impact.

As communications professionals, we're the lynchpin that helps them construct a strategy and build campaigns that can move the needle in meaningful ways, and now more than ever it's critical that we get it right.

Here are four ways we can do just that:

1. Be Genuine about Corporate Culture.

Any effective communications strategy around protecting the environment and supporting social justice causes must demonstrate that the commitment is real – that it comes directly from the C-Suite and Board and is ingrained in the corporate culture. The effort is doomed from the start if senior leadership isn't fully bought in.

We're seeing that corporations are increasingly defining their brand around sustainability and promoting their commitment to the environment, corporate social responsibility, and making a positive difference in the world. They tout ESG metrics as evidence and for many organizations, it's genuine and indicative of a culture shift from top to bottom. For others, however, they're just trying to check a box because they feel pressure from the market or shareholders. That's when companies get into trouble.

Stakeholders, both internal and external, tend to see through the rhetoric and recognize it has no substance—this is devastating for the health of an organization. If employees and customers don't believe that senior leaders are invested and genuine in sustainability principles, they won't embrace any initiatives that get rolled out.

The modern workforce increasingly sees these efforts as critical factors when choosing who to work for. A study published in the [Harvard Business Review](#) found that nine out of 10 American professionals surveyed across 26 industries would accept lower lifetime earnings in exchange for greater meaning at work. Gone are the days when salary was the only differentiator between prospective employers—meaningful action on social issues matters.

In fact, [New York University's Stern Center for Sustainable Business](#) finds that good sustainability programs yield millions in benefits, both in financial and less concrete

terms. Their Return on Sustainability Investment (ROSI) metric identifies nine drivers of financial performance that can improve with good sustainability strategies:

- Innovation
- Operational Efficiency
- Sales and Marketing
- Customer Loyalty
- Risk Management
- Employee Relations
- Supplier Relations
- Media Relations
- Stakeholder Engagement

Notice anything about that list? It includes every aspect of business operations. Clearly, focusing on sustainability is no longer a "nice to have"; it's a sound business strategy and a story worth telling.

2. Transparency and Candor.

I learned early on that the first rule of good media and public relations is "never, ever lie." Communications professionals must ensure that ESG reporting is transparent and candid and as the volume of companies doing this kind of reporting increases, it only becomes more important.

There isn't a standard set of metrics for ESG, so it can get confusing when companies report on progress differently. Regardless of the metrics, they must be clearly articulated and independently verifiable. Investors, consumers, competitors, and even the company's employees will look at the report. Even more scrutiny gets leveled on publicly traded companies. Inaccurate or incomplete reporting can have serious consequences, both in the court of public opinion and at the hands of enforcement agencies like the SEC, particularly as they move to finalize formal disclosure rules.

I've heard arguments from some that don't want to report ESG performance unless mandated for this very reason. While I understand that inclination, even a caveated and qualified report is better than nothing. Every company starts somewhere, and if you're only looking at a few metrics in your first report, that's perfectly acceptable. However, the same rules apply – be authentic. It can't just be a marketing gimmick.

Another concern I hear is around negative legacy issues in an organization's history. Maybe that's a less-than-stellar record on environmental issues or problematic past hiring and promotion practices. The best policy is to acknowledge past sins and focus on the future.

As communicators, we can help organizations find the middle ground between risk-averse executives or lawyers (speaking as an attorney who has served in both State and Federal government positions) who might be hesitant to say anything at all and marketers whose enthusiasm to convert sales might lead them to overstate the company's action. We can help develop messaging to show how corporations have turned the corner and embraced a business philosophy and culture centered on doing good.

3. Finding the Right Message and Messenger.

It's not enough to have a compelling narrative. The person delivering the message needs to be equally attention-grabbing. Recent efforts to change behavior in response to the global pandemic and climate change are instructive on this point.

First, on climate change:

A [study out of Great Britain](#) looked at public engagement on climate change post-Brexit, focusing on those who identified themselves as being right-of-center politically. Participants appreciated an upbeat, positive tone around a clean energy future, but they didn't respond well to absolutes: "we can have a 100% clean energy future", for example. Messaging that indicated the need for a dramatic behavior change was more challenging for them to embrace.

The core values of the focus group included a sense of fairness, protecting their families, helping others, and living a good life. Messaging consistent with those values was more likely to be well-received.

This is true of most people across the political and ideological spectrum. They're not as likely to embrace action to address climate change if they're told they must give up their ICE cars entirely. They're more likely to respond when given options: drive a more fuel-efficient or electric vehicle. They'll take action to prevent illness in their children stemming from carbon emissions, but don't mobilize based on academic discussions and data around rising temperatures and the polar ice caps.

Second, on the pandemic:

During the early stages of the pandemic, we heard from politicians, media personalities, and scientists. Most of them were white men. They were disseminating highly scientific and granular data combined with doom and gloom warnings on the dangers of the virus and the need for social isolation and vaccination. Vaccination rates stayed well below 50% and COVID rates continued to rise.

We changed our messengers and got different results, recognizing that not all audiences respond to the same message in the same way. We began to tailor messaging to the audience and deliver it through messengers they connected with. Professional athletes, country music stars, clergy, and social media influencers did their part to communicate with people who listened to them. The result was progress. The lesson is that we can win over even the most skeptical listener with positivity and respect instead of domineering and demeaning.

4. Actions Speak Louder Than Words.

To borrow a phrase from Nike, "Just Do It."

Talk is cheap. To see real positive change requires action, one company at a time, one community at a time. Action is contagious. When one organization starts making an impact, others tend to follow. Those who act get the best talent to join, develop innovative products, attract the most desirable investors, and achieve the best financial results. Just getting started towards making a difference can inspire others to follow and when they do, we can change the world: save the planet, champion diversity, and achieve social justice.

As Margaret Mead put it, "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."

(This article appeared in Medika Life)





ECOHEALTH: TACKLING CRISES OF ENVIRONMENTAL AND PUBLIC HEALTH

By: Bob Martineau
Senior Partner, Environmental Policy
and Communications

Historically, we've looked at environmental degradation and human health issues as separate policy and scientific issues. We focus on fixing problems, not preventing them. In truth, the health of our planet and those who inhabit it are inextricably intertwined. The health industry can and should lead from the front to effect change that will improve our public and planetary health. We must be proactive.

Dr. James E.K. Hildreth, the Dean of Meharry Medical College in Nashville, TN, recently noted, "Our planet does not need humans to be healthy, but we need a healthy planet for humans to survive." The interconnection of planetary and human health is called "EcoHealth."

All told, 24% of deaths worldwide are linked to environmental factors. That's 26 deaths every minute, every day. Climate change is a reality that we all must face. The latest example is the impact of Hurricane Ian in Florida this fall. For those following the global news scene, consider the flooding in Pakistan and Germany. More than 150 million citizens of our planet are now displaced due to climate impact.

While the urgency to address EcoHealth challenges has never been greater, the reluctance to change is equally strong. In the U.S., our ability to act is undermined by our deeply divided political system.

Delivering a Message People Will Listen To

To change behaviors, we must compel action. To compel action, the message must resonate. We live in an era of huge distrust of the government, the media, intellectuals, and anyone with different political views than our own. Moreover, we live in an age of rampant disinformation. It is hard to distill fact from fiction. How can we change behavior if we do not have a basic understanding of the truth?

Changing behavior requires both a message that resonates and a trusted messenger. The health industry is uniquely positioned to provide both and lead the effort.

The answer is persistence and delivering the message in positive and relatable terms.

We must strike a balance between conveying a sense of urgency and maintaining a can-do attitude. People will act if they believe their actions will result in positive life changes.

Climate change discussions focused on the melting ice caps and polar bears are too far removed from most people's experience to resonate truly. Instead, life sciences companies can help encourage people to learn about how our immediate environment affects the health and well-being of our neighbors, while also leading community engagement programs that make a difference in local environmental degradation.

The messenger is as important as the message. Some will respond to scientific data, but many will not. We saw that clearly in the initial response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Uptake of the vaccine was slow when it was just political leaders and scientists lecturing from the podium, but we saw an uptick in vaccination rates when the messengers became country music stars, professional athletes, preachers in the pulpit, and entertainment figures.

Change is difficult and necessary for our human and planetary health. The health industry can help drive change with positive messages and proactive measures.

(This article appeared in PM360)



WHY CORPORATE SUSTAINABILITY NEEDS TO MOVE FROM GOOD TO GREAT

By: Bess Winston
Senior Partner, ESG Strategy
and Communications

“Don’t let the perfect get in the way of the good.” So goes the chiding expression that’s a popular mantra among management types and efficiency experts.

In my view, it’s become an acceptable “out” for giving up, for only halfway addressing a problem or for providing surface-level solutions that at least signal, “Well, we’re doing our best.”

Maybe it’s the results-oriented Generation X in me, but increasingly, I worry that this hackneyed phrase is being used more and more to provide air cover and justification for delivering unexceptional impacts or just fair to middling outcomes across a variety of areas. And that’s dangerous, especially in business — and more specifically, in companies and organizations working toward achieving ambitious sustainability commitments.

When it comes to climate action, diversity and inclusion, ending poverty, responsibly consuming the Earth’s resources, and other global issues of our time, should we really settle for less than perfect?

Has the embrace of this spiritless phrase given absolution to corporate boards and governments for results that are not only falling short but that over the long term, no one can really afford?

A September 2021 analysis of the climate commitments of Fortune Global 500 companies found that “there has been a three-fold increase in net zero targets, 50% increase in the number of companies that have either achieved carbon neutrality or are targeting it by 2030, and a 25% increase in Science-Based Targets.” This is all really good. But the data also revealed that “more than 60% of companies in the Fortune Global 500 are not committed to deliver a meaningful climate milestone by 2030” (and that’s pretty mediocre).

What happens when a company takes a mediocre approach to an environmental, social and governance initiative like corporate climate action? The most obvious

impact is the exposure to physical and financial risk as a result of not reducing greenhouse gas emissions. But perhaps more important is that without exemplary commitments to climate action, companies miss the opportunity to innovate, which is inherently part of making changes to operations and business practices when you are shifting to a less carbon-intensive economy. This is a miss that can affect growth, profitability and even market position.

Another area where coming up short of perfection can be consequential is in the oversight of sustainability commitments by corporate boards of directors. This is where road maps for action are created and accountability measures are defined. And while more and more boards are taking on this responsibility (which is also good), there is a stark lack of expertise, and the right nuanced backgrounds in sustainability, among board members. A report from the NYU Stern Center for Sustainable Business notes that only 29% of the 1,188 Fortune 100 board directors examined in 2019 had relevant ESG credentials, but that this total is largely concentrated on the social element of ESG. Twenty-one percent of directors had relevant social experience, but only 6% had governance experience and 6% environmental experience.

Furthermore, PwC’s 2021 Annual Corporate Directors Survey revealed that only 52% of directors said that ESG issues regularly have a place on the board meeting agendas. Only 25% say their boards understand ESG risks very well.

These are numbers that point to “barely adequate” at best when ambitions should stop short of nothing but excellence.

There’s no question that getting to perfection takes time and it’s not easy. Innovation doesn’t happen overnight (and it’s expensive). Changing behaviors is complex. But no progressive company should settle for a hall pass. Getting to perfect is a journey, and it requires fearlessly calibrating commitments and goals to match the size of the problem, even one of the magnitude of climate change.

The path toward perfection starts with a reset of attitudes and aspirations. Instead of settling for less than perfect, I think companies (and their boards) should adopt a new mantra: “Why be good when we can be great?”

(This article appeared in Forbes Agency Council)

HOSPITALS AND DIGITAL HEALTH CAN SAVE PEOPLE AND THE PLANET

By: Gil Bashe
Chair Global Health and Purpose

There is no escaping the reality that the planet's health and our own are joined, and the health community must unite with environmental affairs experts to collaborate on what must be done to keep the planet vibrant. As World Health Organization Director-General Tedros Adhanom Chebreyesus, Ph.D., wrote in the [Healthcare Without Harm](#) report, "Places of healing should be leading the way, not contributing to the burden of disease."

Yet, the global healthcare industry is responsible for two gigatons of carbon dioxide each year, 4.4% of net emissions worldwide. Hospitals generate some five million tons of [medical waste](#) annually from everyday trash such as medical packaging and food to regulated medical waste, which includes used surgical gowns, gloves, scissors, and syringes. **If the healthcare sector were a country, it would be the world's fifth-largest contributor to greenhouse gases following China, the US, India, and Russia.** This is not the [US News and World Report](#) ranking that any hospital would want to receive.

Health systems are working feverishly to correct course, and to do this, many major centers of medical excellence must align their sustainability and health outcome priorities. Enter eco-health and the next wave of digital health approaches that have the potential to check the health ecosystem's contribution to the pace of planetary degradation. Through eco-health innovation,

the healthcare industry has the potential not only to block negative impacts, but also to become agents of positive change as we confront the greatest public health challenges of our generation—the fight to sustain a healthy planet, and therefore, us.

Healthcare's response to the pandemic has already driven positive change without intending to. Hospitals that mobilized to implement state-of-the-art telehealth and remote care technologies, essential during the height of COVID-19, did so to increase access to care. But these digital health and medical technologies benefit our environment directly. Telemedicine and EMRs already reduced in-person office visits by [up to 26%](#) in the years prior to the pandemic, and experts report that making telemedicine a permanent healthcare delivery feature could result in a [40–70% reduction](#) in carbon emissions.

DIGITAL HEALTH AND EMRs ALSO SAVE TREES

In a sector known for love of paperwork and files, Electronic Medical Records (EMRs), geared to provide convenient access to health information for professionals and consumers alike, also have another benefit, saving entire forests. [Kaiser Permanente](#), the nation's largest integrated, nonprofit health system, claims that its efforts to prioritize environmental health and patient care enabled it to become the first health system in the

US to achieve [carbon-neutral status](#). According to their report, EMRs and telemedicine reduce paperwork and in-person patient visits, and the carbon sequestered can be equal to 19,200 acres of forest. Imelda Dacones, MD, president and CEO of Northwest Permanente Medical Group affirms:

"As physicians, climate change is absolutely in our lane—let's educate ourselves, our patients, and our communities. As a world, we will develop vaccines and effective medicines to treat the COVID-19 pandemic. Climate change, on the other hand, is a public health crisis where there will be no point of return if we don't act today."

[CommonSpirit Health](#), with 137 hospitals and more than 1,000 care centers across 21 states, [reports](#) that 1.5 million virtual patient visits between March 2020 and April 2021 resulted in 37,440,731 miles not traveled and 1,678,956 gallons of gas not combusted, for a savings of \$3.509 million and a reduction of 15,092 metric tons of CO2 emissions. Beyond increasing our air quality, that translates to roughly 18,490 acres of forest saved. In addition, patients gained back 923,276 hours by visiting their physicians online, no small matter for our packed workday schedules. That is the power of planning and prioritizing eco-health.

HOSPITALS CONSUME ENERGY

Beyond what goes on inside their corridors, physical healthcare facilities account for 4.8% of the total area of commercial buildings and use 10.3% of total energy consumption in this sector, making hospitals the second-largest energy-intensive consumer of US commercial buildings. Considering their medical equipment and 24-hour

operation needs, it's understandable, but hospitals have an opportunity here to tap into technologies that reduce energy dependence. Many of the nation's leading medical centers are rallying to apply their public health expertise in order to take on climate change.

Bob Martineau, JD, senior partner, environment, energy and sustainability at FINN Partners, served as Tennessee's commissioner of environment and conservation, and is a past president of the Environmental Council of the States. Based in Nashville, recognized as the capital of the nation's health provider service sector, Martineau says:

"Hospitals and healers focus intuitively on delivering exceptional patient care. That mission extends to ecohealth, which impacts positively the community and its future generations. Just as health systems have been societal role models in disease prevention and self-care, hospitals can lead from the front and advocate for policies that protect us from environmental risk, and they can inspire others to act by communicating what steps they are taking to lead the way."

Throughout a hospital, technology including robots that deliver supplies, handheld devices for staff, and integrated bedside terminals is implemented to benefit both staff and patients. By tapping into cutting-edge technologies—from those that access patient data to the chromatic glass that adjusts the facility's temperature, Humber River Hospital in Toronto, Canada was recognized by the Intelligent Health Association as North America's [first digital hospital](#).

THE PROVIDER SYSTEM AS ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGE CHAMPION

When it comes to implementing science that improves quality care, crafting global medical guidelines, and taking part in drug development, hospitals have been innovators. Now, it's time for our provider system to become change agents mobilizing for the planet by embracing green technologies such as smart beds, artificial intelligence, EMRs, virtual reality, digital health, and more.

True, the use of digital health technologies does not come without its own environmental impact. Unlike paper, which has a defined carbon footprint, digital products [require power and infrastructure](#) that still consume energy and produce electronic waste. But these negative impacts can also be mitigated through the adoption of green power and intelligent innovation in emerging recycling programs.

This should not prevent hospitals from being part of the global solution by innovating to create and adopt a new medical system dedicated to improving human health through eco-health technology. By drawing on the imaginations of architects, entrepreneurs, engineers, scientists, physicians and healthcare professionals, our hospital systems and health facilities have the opportunity to change the world in significant, sustainable, and lasting ways.

Whenever there is a pressing need to save and sustain life, the health sector has always been in the vanguard as passionate innovators and societal role models. Now, hospitals around the world are not only centers of patient-care excellence, they are poised to be among the most effective champions of planetary health.

(This article appeared in Medika Life)



OUR HEALTH AND OUR PLANET'S HEALTH ARE INTERTWINED

By: Gil Bashe
Chair Global Health and Purpose

It's the Right Time for Bipartisan Engagement

The U.S. Senate's bipartisan approval of a \$1 trillion infrastructure plan should give cause for collective hope. It's extremely encouraging that our leaders in government, regardless of political party affiliation, can agree on something this important. The Build Back Better Agenda's component of repairing our nation's bridges, roads and public transit systems is desperately needed and long overdue.

Looking beneath the surface of the Senate Infrastructure Bill uncovers much more "there" there. Beyond roadways, airways and railways, there is recognition in this legislation—which is more important to our future than many Americans realize—that economic health, environmental health and public health are not only aligned, they are inextricably intertwined.

Think back on the environmental disasters of the last few decades: Los Angeles and toxic smog; soil contamination in Toms River, New Jersey; Flint, Michigan's poisoned water supply. These were not isolated incidents, but part of a growing pattern of environmental degradation that impacts our very health and lives. This disturbing pattern continues in nearly constant present-day environmental catastrophes: wildfires raging throughout the American West and now in Greece and Turkey; extreme storms across the U.S. and the world, resulting in rising floodwaters wiping out whole towns in southern Europe; African famines caused by ever-increasing water scarcity. This litany of environmental disasters almost too numerous to count signals, even to skeptics, that something must be done.

Who must act? These are not Republican or Democratic Party problems, and they are not caused solely by one company or one industry. Fixing the root causes of these issues will require the best efforts of all of us: lawmakers, businesses and citizens. Preventing disease, despair and death is now a national—nay, a global—imperative, and environmental health, economic health and public health are everyone's priorities.

The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act is a good first step toward finally working together on these defining health issues. It provides much more than infrastructure; its importance to mitigating climate change and improving environmental health—and thereby, human health—is critical. Allen Hershkowitz, Ph.D., board chairman and founding director of Sport and Sustainability

International and former senior scientist at the Natural Resources Defense Council, shares:

“The U.S. Senate’s bipartisan infrastructure bill provides critically important funding for some of the investments urgently needed to address climate change, water pollution, and the shift away from fossil-fuel-based transportation. In doing so, the infrastructure bill will advance important ecological and public health goals, and it will undoubtedly support a healthy economy for years to come.”

Here are the public health highlights that are the unseen part of this bipartisan bill:

Clean Drinking Water

Right now, up to 10 million American households and 400,000 schools and childcare centers lack safe drinking water. The proposed bill’s \$55 billion allocation represents the largest investment in clean drinking water in American history. It includes dedicated funding to replace lead pipes found across America, from rural towns to struggling cities to prosperous suburban neighborhoods. The deal’s significant investment in water infrastructure across America includes the Tribal Nations and disadvantaged communities that have been neglected longest and which need it most.

“Lead exposure in a child’s early years comes with guaranteed harm to their development—replacing America’s lead pipes is a sorely overdue national priority, and means thousands of healthier children and families,” added EPA’s recent chemical office chief Alexandra Dunn.

Environmental Remediation

Where you live impacts how long and how well you live. Thousands of U.S. communities contain ticking toxic time bombs. The harsh reality is that 26% of Black Americans and 29% of Hispanic Americans live within three miles of a Superfund site, exposing these communities of color to dangerous levels of lead and other heavy metals and chemicals. At special risk are children, whose endocrine and other bodily systems are still developing.

The Senate-approved deal invests \$21 billion in environmental remediation to tackle legacy pollution that diminishes the health of whole towns and neighborhoods. In addition to protecting the health of these communities, the legislation provides funds and creates jobs to clean up Superfund and brownfield sites. If we turn our backs on these tasks, we turn our backs on the people living near these sites across the nation.

Public Transit

America’s transit system is hobbled with a **multibillion-dollar repair backlog** of more than 24,000 buses, 5,000 rail cars, 200 stations, and thousands of miles of track, signals, and power systems in need of replacement. The Senate’s \$39 billion allocation to modernize transit, the largest-ever Federal investment in public transit, dedicates a larger share of funds to repair and upgrade aging infrastructure, modernize bus and rail fleets, make stations accessible to all users and bring transit service to forgotten communities. It will replace thousands of aging transit vehicles with clean, zero emission vehicles. Communities of color, twice as likely as average to rely on public transportation, will see long-neglected needs addressed.

Electric School Buses

Our nation’s children have long breathed black smoke emissions belching from **the yellow school bus fleets** that take them to and from school. Diesel air pollution is linked to asthma, cancer, heart disease and other health problems that cause students to miss school, particularly in communities of color and Tribal communities. This legislation will deliver thousands of electric school buses nationwide, helping more than 25 million children and thousands of bus drivers. It will also promote production of clean, non-polluting American-made buses.

Pollution Mitigation for Communities of Color

Black people are almost three times more likely to die from asthma-related causes than their white counterparts. More than one in three Latinx/Hispanics in the U.S.—or more than 23 million—live in counties where the air quality does not meet Environmental Protection Agency public health standards for smog.

The Senate’s roughly \$65 billion investment is the single largest in clean energy transmission in the nation’s history. It upgrades the country’s power infrastructure, calling for thousands of miles of new, resilient transmission lines that open pathways for renewable energy; creates a new “Grid Deployment Authority” that will lead to research and development for advanced transmission and electricity distribution technologies; and promotes smart grid planning and next-generation technologies such as carbon capture and clean hydrogen, resulting in air that we can all breathe safely.

The Infrastructure bill is a huge step forward, but it needs to be fully funded and supported.

“There is an inseparable relationship between human health, economic health and planetary health and given the scale and urgency of worsening global climate disruption, and the threat

it poses to human survival, much more needs to be done,” states Dr. Hershkowitz. “To more effectively prepare our economy for the life-and-death ecological challenges that communities will face in the 21st century, and to do so equitably, it is essential for the Senate to now pass a budget reconciliation bill that builds on the important investments contained in the Senate’s bipartisan infrastructure bill. Doing so is essential if we are to truly transform our economy into one that aligns with ecological requirements.”

This needs to happen quickly for the sake of every aspect of our health. Supporting our environment is a good investment with a significant return. And, although paying the price tag may seem a big pill to swallow, funding the bipartisan package won’t be achieved through higher taxes, but rather by repurposing already allocated funds, including unused COVID-19 aid. Government will not have to work alone. Industry is ready and eager to roll-up-its sleeves to help. Adds Rachel Hodgdon, International WELL Building Institute (IWBI), President and CEO:

“IWBI has always believed that human health and planetary health are inextricably linked. In our work to promote, assess and certify spaces

that advance human health and well-being, we recognize how critical it is to highlight the link between buildings, human health and climate change. As the country considers significant investments in public infrastructure, our buildings are poised to lead by example in the effort to create people-first places. Now is our chance to take full advantage of the federal government’s infrastructure proposal to deliver real benefits for people in the form of cleaner air and water and smart building technologies that measure and validate human performance metrics.”

Looking at the world around us, we can see the result of neglecting our infrastructure—America is crumbling. But we can also see the result of neglecting our environmental health, as our communities are ravaged by nature’s wrath in the form of storms, fires and pandemics. It’s time America moved forward united, addressing our environmental health by providing clean drinking water, cleaning-up environmental contamination, and decreasing pollution and greenhouse emissions, all of which have had disastrous impacts on our economic and public health. The Senate bill offers a ray of hope. A good start at addressing long neglected issues. It is not a cure, but it is a step in the right direction.

(This article appeared in Medika Life)

CHAPTER 5: ESG

“Without exemplary commitments to climate action, companies miss the opportunity to innovate, which is inherently part of making changes to operations and business practices when you are shifting to a less carbon-intensive economy. This is a miss that can affect growth, profitability and even market position.”

- Bess Winston
Senior Partner, ESG Strategy
and Communications



ESG DISCLOSURES CAN BE UNCOMFORTABLE (AND THAT'S OKAY)

By: Bess Winston
Senior Partner, ESG Strategy
and Communications

In so many areas, around so many subjects, I'm hearing counsel to businesses along the lines of: "You need to get comfortable being uncomfortable." It's sage advice that makes sense, especially when it comes to sustainability-related disclosures.

To thoughtfully and consequentially address such topics as diversity and inclusion, climate change, or any one of the many other complex issues of our time, some companies must face a not-so-ideal present, a difficult past or both. Doing so in daylight, whether voluntarily or by mandate, is uncomfortable. The question then becomes: Do you face your reality, warts and all, or burrow further undercover, convincing yourself and your stakeholders that your sow's ear is a silk purse?

There's another factor, too. For some companies, Covid and supply chain issues (not to mention ongoing inflationary pressures) continue to wreak havoc on day-to-day operations. As a result, executives do not have the bandwidth or resources to take on long-term problems with no easy solutions, even if they are the very issues that are critical to future-proofing a business enterprise.

Often when ESG initiatives are pursued, there's a lack of understanding around what is (and is not) progress, which makes it harder and still more uncomfortable for businesses to wrestle with these issues. An April global survey of 1,491 executives across 16 markets conducted by The

Harris Poll for Google Cloud revealed that accountability and action are admittedly fleeting.

Results showed that **"only 36% of respondents said that their organizations have measurement tools in place to quantify their sustainability efforts, and just 17% are using those measurements to optimize based on results."** In addition, in North America, **72% of respondents believe their business has overstated its sustainability initiatives. One executive responded, "My company treats sustainability like a PR stunt."**

The road to meaningful ESG progress has to start with an honest reckoning that the path will be both uncomfortable and at times unclear. This approach can be especially challenging for lawyers, engineers and others who are trained to think linearly and move forward only when presented with proven and tested solutions. Not having all the answers or a precisely defined roadmap may get a bit ugly. But that should not deter companies from pursuing change that is needed.

In today's environment, a work-in-progress attitude toward achieving low-carbon operations or an equitable and just workplace is better than no progress at all, or as more eloquently stated by Salvador Dali, "Have no fear of perfection—you'll never reach it."

The companies that will win are those that proactively and smartly convey a serious and thoughtful approach to such matters as climate-related risks, compliance requirements and measurable actions to support a low-carbon future.

The key is to understand and manage sustainability communications and disclosures proactively, regardless of your story. This transparent approach is a growing expectation of shareholders and the general public, and it can cultivate champions, help mitigate your risks, identify gaps, and uncover business and operational opportunities.

In contrast, a burrowed-under "play it close to the vest" strategy can have the unintended consequence of creating an internal echo chamber that prevents you from seeing or realizing these opportunities.

Assessing vulnerabilities and then disclosing them publicly goes against the very principles of competitive business practices. But in many ways, the fundamentals of a competitive enterprise are precisely what can be featured and acknowledged as part of disclosure communications. There's no better storytelling than to share innovative practices and more efficient systems or showcase the top talent working on your commitments. For most businesses, that's a comfortable place to be.

(This article appeared in Forbes Agency Council)



BUSINESSES WITH STRONG SUSTAINABILITY SCORES WILL ATTRACT INVESTORS AND WORKERS

By: Bob Martineau
Senior Partner, Environmental Policy and Communications

Top talent and investors gravitate to companies with strong and authentic environmental-friendly values. Here's why that is important and how to tell your story.

Sustainability: It's not just about the environment anymore. Increasingly, it's part of companies' overall business strategy and encompasses an acronym you may be hearing a lot lately – ESG, or Environment, Social, and Governance.

More and more, there's a correlation between successful companies and those that embrace ESG goals, measure them meaningfully, and communicate them to their stakeholders. Smart companies are realizing that, when it

comes to ESG reporting, investors are demanding it, the workforce is demanding it, and it's a predictor of long-term financial success.

That said, companies must report on their ESG efforts to these three audiences in ways that provide credible and verifiable information.

Below is a how-to guide:

Here is what investors want

Investors today are evaluating the sustainability efforts of a company in deciding where to make strategic investments. The trend is clear.

- In 2020, 515 investors with \$106 trillion in assets, as well as 147 large purchasers with more than \$4 trillion in procurement spend, requested companies report their environmental data through CDP, according to CDP Global reports.
- In his letter to CEOs of portfolio companies, Larry Fink, the CEO of Black Rock, said, "We are asking companies to disclose a plan for how their business model will be compatible with a netzero economy ... and disclose how this plan is incorporated into your long-term strategy."
- In 2020, Elad Roisman, a commissioner for the Securities and Exchange Commission, stated, "If certain information that happens to fall in any of the ESG categories is material to that company, the company needs to disclose it ... we will come after them if they don't."

Here is what workers want

Gen Z and millennials will make up 72% of the workforce by 2029. Most care about more than a paycheck. They want to work for a good corporate citizen.

Companies that focus on and demonstrate good performance on ESG issues will be in a better position to attract and retain an engaged and talented workforce.

For example:

- 40% of millennials will not accept a job from companies that are not inclusive, according to McKinsey.
- A 2020 study by Marsh & McLennan found that:

- Companies with a highly-satisfied workforce have, on average, 14% higher ESG scores than the global average.

- Companies with higher employee satisfaction have higher numbers of women on their board than the global average.

- A survey of American professionals across 26 industries found that nine out of 10 employees said they were willing to accept lower lifetime earnings for greater meaning at work.

These are predictors of long-term financial success

Data is increasingly showing that companies that focus on establishing, measuring and disclosing ESG metrics outperform others:

- In 2020, 81% of a globally-representative selection of sustainable indexes outperformed their parent benchmarks, according to Black Rock.
- The New York Stern Center for Sustainable Practices found that half the consumer-packaged goods growth between 2013 to 2018 came from products marketed as sustainable.
- Of more than 2200 studies since the 1970s, 63 percent found a positive link between ESG performance and financial performance, according to a 2015 Deutsche Bank study.

Six recommendations for reporting best practices

Although there are increasing calls for uniformity in reporting, there is no standardized format to date. So here are some general best practices to consider when tackling ESG tracking and disclosure:

- Determine what matters to you and your stakeholders. Consider your audiences: customers, shareholders and other investors,

financial institutions, regulatory agencies, and employees – and what they care about relative to ESG.

- Include both qualitative and quantitative information.
- Make clear your metrics and goals for progress.
- Demonstrate trends and progress.
- Back up every claim you make. Greenwashing will not work.
- Determine how and where you will report – unless this has already been decided for you.

- Some investment groups may require a certain type of reporting or already use a third-party rating group. If so, follow their lead.

- If you must take the first step in making these decisions, consider carefully how your audiences prefer to consume content. Options include SEC reporting, investor reporting, published corporate sustainability reports, or content easily available on your website.

The reporting bottom line is that you can take control of your own content regardless of investor expectations by providing context, comparisons to the rest of your industry, easily-digestible infographics, and anecdotal support.

But here's the real bottom line: Your reporting must reflect the new reality that ESG principles are increasingly driving business decisions.

Savvy investors and employees are wise to reporting that isn't substantive. They also will reward companies with high ESG scores by investing in them and flocking to work for them. These are the keys to long term growth. And that's what the bottom line is all about.

(This article appeared in The Tennessean)



Since its founding, FINN Partners has sought to rally both its agency and client communities around societal priorities with the understanding that businesses must have a positive impact.

We are honored to work to sustain people and the planet, advocate for equity and justice, and help advance underserved communities and underrepresented people. This is not our singular pursuit; our clients are at the forefront of these efforts. Through partnerships and coalitions, public and private, we unite in addressing the needs of constituents and consumers.

We face immense challenges: racial disparities, health inequities, and the ticking clock of the climate crisis. But we also have equally large opportunities to effect change. Now is the time for corporations and organizations worldwide to seize these opportunities.

The ideas in this work are shared by leaders of exceptional talent and proven abilities who have joined together to be the agency with a heart and a conscience that clients the world over value as a partner. We invite you to engage with us. We are agents of change. We are FINN Partners.

- Gil Bashe
Chair Global Health and Purpose

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