

In a regular new feature, **Harrison Monarth** gives us a flavour of L&D life on the other side of the Atlantic. This month he reveals how green is the new black for corporate America

In America, 'green' is the new black. That's black, as in black ink, aka corporate profits. 'Going green' is business's 'mission à la mode' that has everyone from giant automakers to funeral homes jumping on the bandwagon. It sounds straightforward enough but while senior management may be genuinely concerned about leaving the world a better place for the next generation, or just clever enough to realise that consumer preference for 'green business' can quickly lead to declining profits if the corporation bucks the trend, making the leap is easier said than done.

Thanks partly to high-profile advocates like Hollywood icon Leonardo DiCaprio and the box-office success of former White House regular Al Gore's global warming docudrama *An Inconvenient Truth*, eco-minded American consumers are becoming increasingly aware of their substantial impact on dwindling natural resources, rewarding corporations they feel are doing their best to minimise their 'footprint' on the environment.

The shift towards environmentally friendly business may communicate an organisation's image as a forward-thinking and responsible member of the community, but the foundation of that image must first be created by training and coaching employees on eco-friendly business practices, operations and communicating this new image to the public. It is up to savvy training managers to convey, coach and reinforce the green message to the people in the trenches.

So how are US training departments meeting this formidable challenge?

### Baby-steps to big results

Sustainability requires a commitment throughout the ranks. *Everyone* must be indoctrinated, learn new habits and adopt nothing less than changed thinking for even the simplest tasks. Since progress is often achieved in incremental stages, educating staff on basics like replacing regular light-bulbs

with energy-saving lighting systems for offices and switching off non-essential computers after work can yield big results at the end of the day.

Communication is, without doubt, key to achieving the desired outcomes. From communicating the message of 'sustainability' to employees to the education of customers, consistency and persistence are crucial.

US flooring manufacturer Mohawk Industries is an example of how concerted and sustained effort leads to a solid message that resonates with employees and customers alike. For more than a decade, the company has been training its sales force to spread the message of how recycled materials are used in its wares. Mohawk's trainers also make sure that its message of reduced environmental impact finds its way to dealers selling their products, via sponsored training courses that educate the retail sales associate who will pitch to the buying public.

Telecommunications giant Cortel offers another example of how effective training leads to a reputation as 'eco-friendly', by changing its culture to one that is entirely paperless. No sticky-notes, no paper-based performance reviews, and no paper pay-stubs. Everything is done or viewed online, saving countless trees, and – insert senior management chorus of "Hallelujah" here – costs in the process.

Cortel's training management admits that the cultural shift in behaviour was slow. Yet, rather than being coerced to comply with the new 'green' practices, employees were asked to simply try the new approach for a period of time and, after a while, the new way of doing things stuck. New behaviours eventually became new habits that changed the culture of the company forever.

To achieve the desired results, communication in training is the key. From the small store-owner to the senior VP of training and development at a global conglomerate, the persistence with which you communicate 'going green' to your people can make all the difference, from the bottom line to consumer perception.

Until next month – Cheers from across the pond! ■

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