

## Linking CHEMunity to Sustainability

I typically think of made up words as slightly cute, but mostly irritating. When I first heard the word CHEMunity, I frowned. But when I parked judgment to consider its meaning, I realized it stands for a commitment any responsible company in the chemical industry should own. While it is clear that the creator's intent was to bond CHEMistry with commUNITY interests, the order of the letters is significant. CHEM comes first – leading to create UNITY by serving community needs, interests and concerns. The word reinforces what we all know...for our sustainability, our work must earn the trust of the communities we serve and that takes being in front. This article is the first in a series of three that explains how one SME in the chemical recovery business embarked upon the journey to serve CHEMunity by building a sustainability framework and a sustainability culture.

### JUST A LITTLE BACKGROUND

Our company was founded in 1955 to recycle organic spent solvents and refrigerants – its feedstock. Feedstock is generated from a wide variety of industries including pharmaceutical, automotive, printing, chemical, coatings, aviation, mining and those in the HVAC industry. It uses a variety of conventional and proprietary technologies to create quality products for national and international markets. It operates near the downtown core of Mississauga under the watchful eyes of home residents and the City. Every day is a day to earn the right to operate at our site. Commitment to sustainable development helps us earn that right.

“Sustainable Development” – we hear those words again and again...but what does it all mean in the

context of running a SME in the chemical business? It's hard enough to be profitable. How can a SME afford to focus on the environment and social stewardship programs? Ask yourself the question we asked – what can we do today to ensure our company is around tomorrow...and tomorrow... and tomorrow? Your answers will include actions that cross cut a triple bottom line commitment to People, Planet and Profit.

### WHERE DID WE START?

We defined what we wanted to be. To do that, we needed to understand how our stakeholders saw us. We created a powerful vision and broke it into four vision statements that spoke to sustainable development. We examined our good, our bad and our ugly. We restructured the organization, created policies, objectives and targets, timeframes and accountabilities. Then, we promoted those vision statements inside and outside the company.

Each statement was driven by one person. That person had the responsibility to develop a strategy to fulfill their vision statement. And we held multiple workshops that involved everyone at every level of the company. Staff members generated numerous environmental and cost saving ideas. People became more motivated about the company and their jobs. I am not saying that the first workshops weren't approached with a sense of suspicion; they were. But the commitment to honour those vision statements became better trusted when people began to see tangible results – not just from ideas led by members of the Executive, but improvements led by co-workers. Frequently the work to advance ideas raised in workshops was voluntarily led by staff members.

### MEASURED

At a macro level, each quarter the person responsible for each vision statement reported on its progress. At a micro level, performance indicators were established, tracked and reviewed. The performance assessment program also included feedback on how and where people were contributing to sustainable development goals. But we all know that behaviour resulting in improvements should be rewarded.

### REWARDS

We paid out bonuses for ideas that translated to new sales and cost improvements. Those bonuses are based upon percentages of revenue or cost savings and have ranged from \$500 to \$10,000. But it has been the small yet impactful work that has generated a plethora of rewards we call “spot bonuses” paid to employees who go the extra distance and move us down our sustainability path.

### COMMUNICATION

Thanking people publicly and loudly is very motivating. We use monthly staff meetings (called the “Social”) as a forum in which to brag about and reward people for what they have done right. Equally important to verbal communication is our written communication. Monthly, we publish a Sustainability Report Card that provides updates on activities related to profit, environmental



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initiatives at our company and for our customers and political and community involvement. Particularly in a company committed to profit sharing, frequent, systematic communication is necessary and powerful.

### RESULTS

Results are merely a snapshot in time, but we have won many awards for community involvement, employee engagement and environmental excellence. And as I write, we are enjoying a very profitable year. It has not been without facing fears and emotional spends but life is simpler when decisions are filtered through vision and a triple bottom line management system.

### IN SUMMARY

Commitment to CHEMunity is honoured through our commitment to sustainable development. It is not a project - it will never have an end point - we are on a path. It is our culture that is driving the creation of profit while and through caring for people and planet.

In the next article I will describe the integration of credentials into a sustainability framework and the use of branding to drive vision.

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