

Storm Warnings: Best Practices provides timely information, trends and ideas that relate to the looming storm and impact on our lives.



BEST PRACTICES

“Practical solutions for challenging times”

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Sustainability: An Introduction

The best working definition of sustainability may be this: the ability to meet the needs of today without compromising the ability to meet the needs of tomorrow. If our global society continues upon the same path it's been on since the Industrial Revolution, this simply will not be possible. In sustainability, we talk about the Triple Bottom Line: People, Planet, and Profits. Sustainability is founded upon the notion that you can do well by both people and the planet while still generating a profit. It is a different paradigm, to be sure, but it is one that modern society must embrace.

Consider this quote from Diane Dumanoski, author of *The End of the Long Summer: Why We Must Remake Our Civilization to Survive a Volatile Earth*: “It took all of human history for the global economy to reach the 1950 level of \$5 trillion; in this decade alone [the 2000s], the world economy expanded that much in a single year.” All of that growth is realized through the ever-increasing consumption of resources such as freshwater, minerals, timber, and fossil energy. It has also been dependent on sometimes questionable, inequitable treatment of human capital, or labor. Expecting that kind of growth to continue unabated is not only unsustainable, it's madness.

In the 150 or so years since the Industrial Revolution, population has increased six-fold; energy use has increased eighty-fold; and the economy has increased sixty-eight fold. To be sure, fossil fuels have helped to create this staggering amount of wealth. At the same time, the unfettered use of fossil fuels is also helping to create, as readers of this website are aware, The Perfect Storm.

Practicing sustainability, or living sustainably, does not mean that we have to stop everything we are doing and regress to the Stone Age, or the Bronze Age, or even the 1990s. The fact is that there are plenty of opportunities to continue our way of life while simultaneously improving the way we live, and changing how we live to better fit the realities with which we are now faced. Think of sustainability as living within the means that the planet has afforded us. It is a way of treading more lightly across the planet rather than running roughshod over her, acting as if our choices are without consequences.

As I find and share stories of products, trends, organizations, processes and technologies

for the Best Practices feature of *Weathering the Storm*, I'll be highlighting their contributions to sustainability, and how they will positively impact our future as a species on planet Earth. These may be innovations in renewable energy, construction materials production, water purification, agriculture, transportation, and the like. The point of this new focus, as our publisher R. Michael Conley stated, is to highlight the positive developments that are emerging in these increasingly anxious times.

We do not have to accept that the glory days of innovation and cheap energy are behind us. I would argue that we are on the cusp of a second, smarter, and better Industrial Revolution in which we learn to better harness the potential of our planet, rather than tearing it asunder, plundering its resources, and treating the air and water like landfills. We've been gorging ourselves on the natural capital the planet has afforded us for a long time, and the waiter is approaching our table with the check. Adopting the tenets of sustainability will go a long way to pay the bill, and will set the table for future generations as well.

I look forward to sharing these studies in optimism and hope with you.

Matt Hoiland

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