

Selling in Sustainability

Gaining Buy-in for Moving Sustainable Business Practices Forward



*Written by Nancy A. Shenker, CEO, Innovator
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Even the most highly-skilled sales people and business leaders meet objections. Sustainable building has been proven to result in cost-reduction over time, operating efficiencies, and significant improvements in employee and community wellness. Yet, many decision-makers are not yet convinced that taking steps towards environmentally-sound construction and remodeling makes sense.

The formula for gaining buy-in is a complex combination of human psychology, powerful and credible storytelling, and -- above all -- compelling financial data. Business leaders are facing many challenges this year. But you can still make a strong case for green building and cultivate a team that is tenacious and equipped with the data they need to transform companies and communities.



Meet The 4 Types of Decision-Makers



"That sounds expensive."

"Our company doesn't do things that way."

"We need to discuss it with the Board."

"Sounds like a lot of hype to me."

"Great idea! Tell me more..."

commitment by many people -- inside and outside a company's walls. How do you ultimately get everyone on board and take positive action? Throughout your career, you'll encounter many different types of leaders, influencers, and decision-makers. Before you

learn how to create an environment of sustainability within your workplace, think about the people in your company who make decisions. Although the types are vast generalizations, we can all think of people who fit into each group.

Sound familiar?

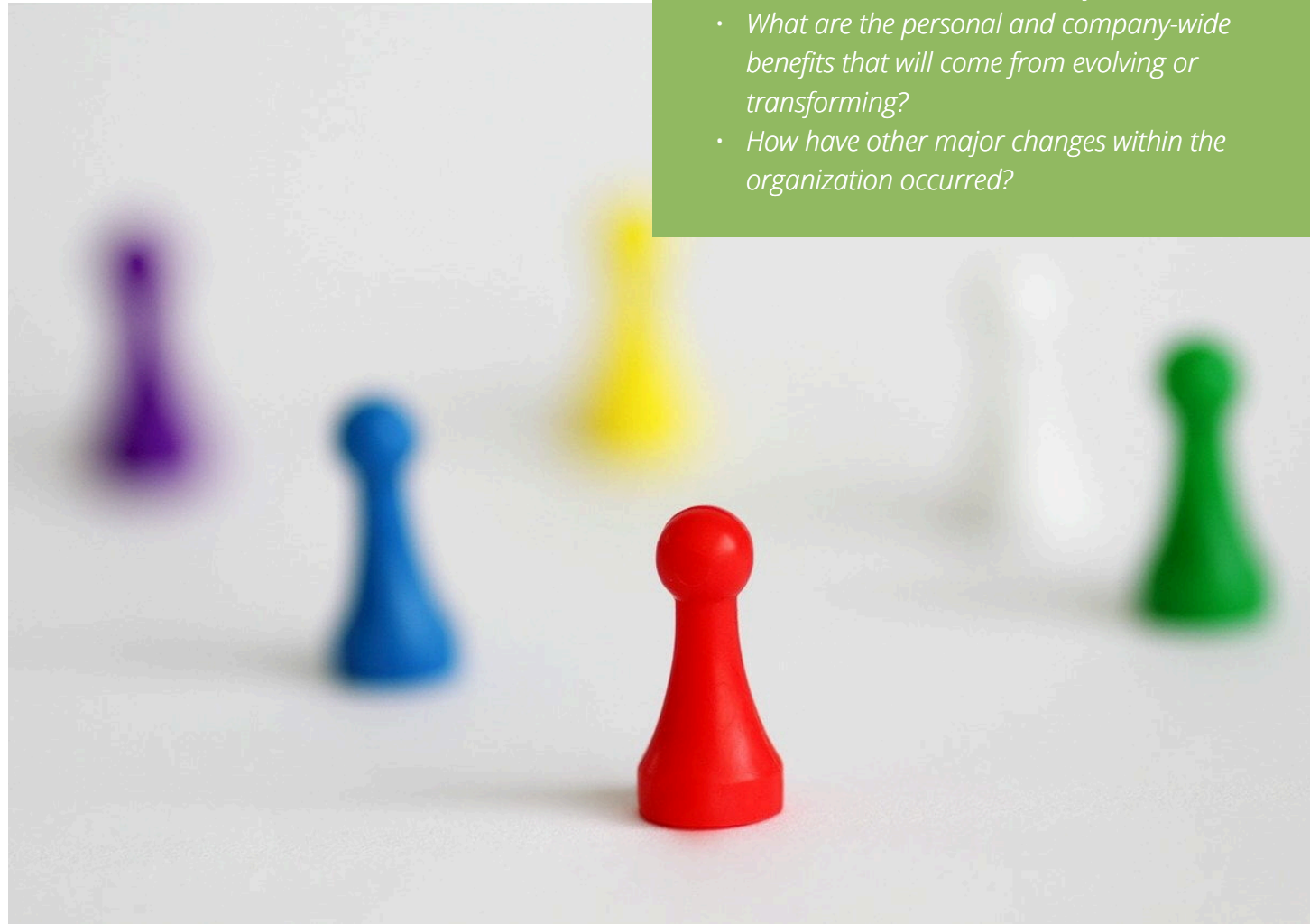
Both small and large businesses struggle with change. Although some companies are truly committed to sustainable practices, many others are yet to come on board. Or, worse yet, they create a sustainability function within the organization to "check a box," but don't listen to or respect the ideas that come from the person who leads it.

We all know that building an organization committed to sustainability requires



1. **Leaders and Role Models:** These are the innovators who respect the business practices that helped them achieve success, but are always thinking of how they can move their business to the next level of success and profitability.
2. **Slow and Steady Game-Changers:** Possessing vision and drive, these professionals are committed to making change, but must influence individuals and groups around them to believe in a mission. Collaborative and good listeners, they meet objections with tact and patience.
3. **The Skeptics:** No matter what the idea, they are ready to say “no” or raise objections based more on emotion than on fact. Some of them can be swayed by facts, while others may need to be outnumbered by types 1 and 2. But, over time, an organization needs to build commitment. Someone who pretends to be committed to a cause, but serves as a detractor, can be a toxic in any business.
4. **Greenwashers:** Using sustainability as a marketing ploy, these people and

companies know that being green is “popular” and don’t walk the talk. Simply paying lip service to sustainability is not a long-term strategy.



To make change within any organization, you need to know:

- *Who is ultimately making decisions?*
- *What are the most common objections?*
- *What are the personal and company-wide benefits that will come from evolving or transforming?*
- *How have other major changes within the organization occurred?*

Why is Selling Sustainability So Challenging?



The perception still remains that environmentally-sound solutions cost a lot of money. LEED building is still in its relative infancy and only over the past two decades have planners, manufacturers, developers, and real estate decision-makers begun to take sustainable building seriously. For more about the history and evolution of the sustainable building movement, [please download this report](#).

Sadly, the sustainability movement has also become highly politicized. Misinformation is

often disseminated by the media and leaders with their own agendas.

Additionally, getting the attention of decision-makers is difficult these days. COVID-19, radical changes in work and school structure, racial unrest, and economic uncertainty, are all consuming "share of mind" for business and community leaders. Adding environmental issues to the mix can be overwhelming for many, although the relationship between sustainability and health is a powerful one.

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..Sustainability depends on getting the science right, but science is often politicized. Battles have occurred in the United States over evolution, vaccination, climate change and genetically modified organisms (GMOs)." - **Ronald Herring, Cornell Professor of Government in the Cornell Chronicle**

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How Leaders and Game-Changers Have Succeeded



Whether you're a manufacturer attempting to schedule a meeting or a CEO who needs to sell in a sustainable remodel to employees and the community, you need to be well-equipped with facts.

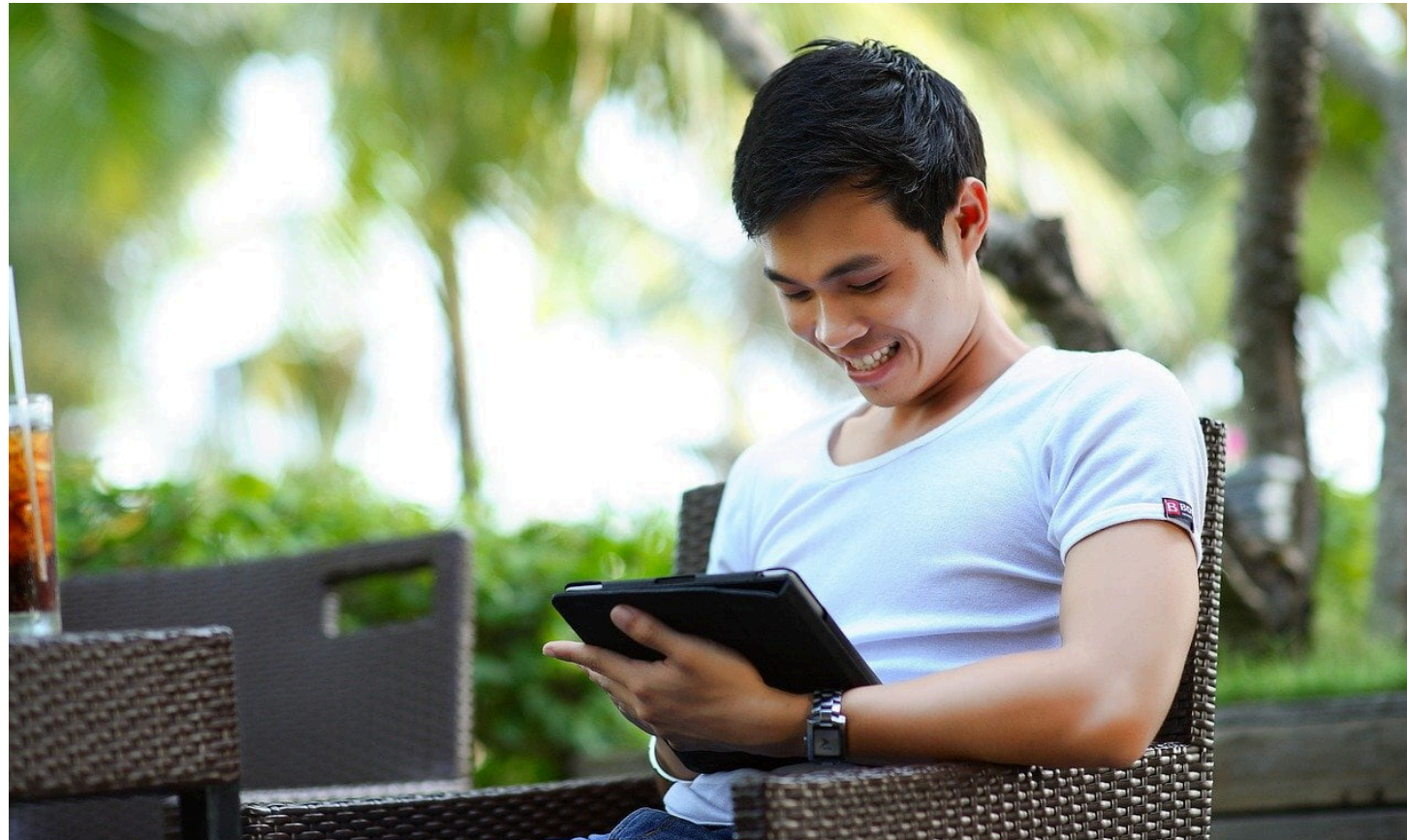
But all sales efforts must also directly and specifically address what the ultimate benefit is to the person making the decision.

For example, a finance manager might be most interested in the bottom-line impact of installing LED lighting, but human resources will want to know how the change will reduce eye strain and improve building security and safety. Knowing who the individual decision-makers and influencers are and how to appeal to them is critical.

Engage third party experts and gather credible case studies from businesses or entities like yours. The more data points and stories you can bring to the table, the easier the sell-in process will be.

[Greenbuild](#) provides a wealth of data and an

engaged community that you can look to for powerful and relevant examples. Building a trusted community of professionals who share your goals and challenges keeps you energized, informed, and empowered.



Sustainability experts weigh in on some challenges they've faced and how they've overcome objections:

Keep the Story Simple

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Model the ROI and establish a direct connection with initiatives. That will help you get buy-in on future projects. Create an emotional connection and simplification of the message” - **Rami Vagal, Senior Manager of Sustainability, Mohawk Industries.**

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Break down the three ways sustainability can boost business growth -- improve financial performance, build customer loyalty, and attract and engage the right employees.” - **Peter Hawksworth, CEO, Future Energy Solutions**

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Educate Consumers & Employees

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The main issue is that most people don't think of buildings when they think of things that impact health and the environment. Buildings are still invisible. We need more coverage of building impacts on health and the environment in mainstream media.” - **Sara Neff, SVP, Sustainability, Kilroy Realty Corporation**

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Sustainability can be greatly advanced by empowering consumers to make better choices. Businesses, the media, and other stakeholders are all influencers of consumer awareness and have a responsibility. People need access to unbiased experts to help them make informed choices on the long-term benefits (or costs) of the products and services they select. Through awareness campaigns and transparent labeling, value can be aligned, allowing consumer choice to drive sustainability, using a carrot better instead of a stick of guilt.” -

C.R. Herro, VP of Innovation, Meritage Homes

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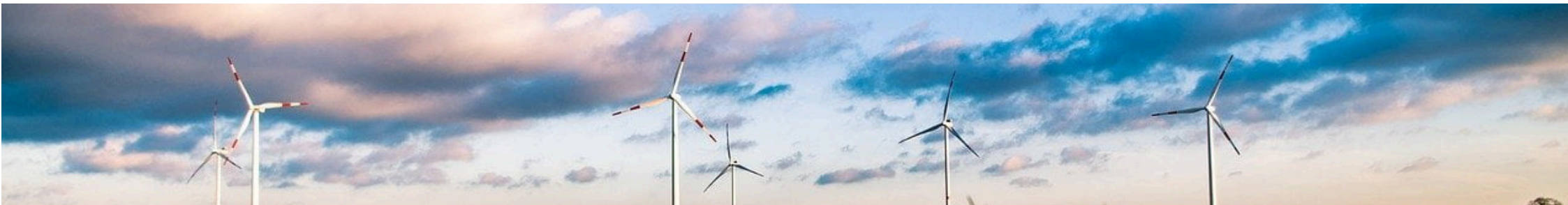
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Management needs to recognize that market values for sustainable building features are increasing. With the rise of certification programs infiltrating both residential and commercial markets, green building raises the market value of properties.” - **Farah Ahmad, Architect, Sustainable Design, NYC School Construction Authority**

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The media can assist in normalizing ultra-green building projects and begin to weave those standards into our cultural fabric. This can be done by framing sustainable action in a politically neutral and highly relevant light, using words like ‘clean,’ ‘pure air’ and ‘non-toxic materials’ rather than ‘sustainable’ and ‘eco-friendly.’”

- **Maria Agazio, Sustainability & Energy Efficiency Lead, Motili**
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Use Relatable Case Studies

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Tie case studies to occupant outcomes. The studies tied to money are most compelling. If you’re not making an economic point, you won’t be giving the decision-maker all of the information they need.” - **Lucas Hamilton, Manager, Building Science Applications, CertainTeed/Saint-Gobain**

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Green building doesn’t always have to be glitzy. Some of the most important projects can be retrofits that maintain the sense of place while reducing waste & operating costs.” - **Rob Zimmerman, Director of Sustainability (retired), Kohler Co.**

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Bust the Myths

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One perception even within the sustainable building community is that you can only achieve one goal at a time -- energy, health, water, etc. It would be more impactful, through a collaborative approach, to make as much progress in as many areas as possible. I'd also like to see the media cover climate change with the same vigor as they do reality TV stars.” - **Todd Sims, Director of Sustainability, American Chemistry Council**

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Some people still think that green buildings are equivalent to LEED and that LEED is equivalent to code -- especially in major cities. LEED is not equivalent to code in most places. In some places, code is stricter than LEED. Equating all green buildings to LEED doesn't allow for strategies that push even further.” - **Jennifer Taranto, Director of Sustainability, Structure Tone**

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A common and big misconception is that green buildings are 'harder to live/work in.' In other words, a misconception exists that sustainable buildings require that users change their own behaviors. But this is generally not the case.” - **Jon Smieja, Corporate Sustainability Manager, Andersen Windows & Doors**

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How YOU Can Become a Better Sustainable Building Advocate



Only by combining the human and financial and factual aspects of sustainable building can you begin to make change. Knowing your audience and the sweet spots of each decision-maker is critical.

Then you need to begin the process of education -- using compelling case studies and highly-relatable language. Enlist a team of internal and external experts who can help build your case.

Above all, develop a solid system of measurement and tracking so you can use your success metrics to get buy-in for future projects.



1. **Look to similar industries** and projects to get ideas and find best practices.
2. **Stay engaged** in the Greenbuild community. Through our insight-packed Greenbuild 2021 live event and year-round webinars and other media, you'll have access to world-class thought leaders, consultants, manufacturers, and advisors around-the-clock from wherever you
3. **Add your voice** to those of the experts in this report. We encourage you to comment on our social media sites and/or contact us to be considered as a source for one of our reports or webinars.
4. **Join our social media community** of more than 77,000 green building and sustainability professionals!

Thank you for reading

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