Educating consumers about living more environmentally friendly in their communities and workplaces has proven to be a significant challenge. Companies should focus on what is practical—what will work, and not hide behind what is theoretically possible. Companies should not focus on only altruistic reasoning, but rather allow sustainability to be a differentiator leading to customer engagement.

It is important to incorporate sustainability into the overall business strategy of the company and balance the triple bottom line between the economic, social, and environmental impacts. Without all three of those ideals working together, none of the three can be maintained.

Global companies have a difficult challenge in balancing what they are doing domestically for sustainability with what can be done in a developing country where workers may not even have shoes to wear to work. It’s important to protect these workers, engage them in more sustainable business practices with the goal of having that become their preferred mode of operation.

The CEO and senior leadership must serve as authentic ambassadors for change in regards to their sustainability endeavors. Being green or sustainable has no official definition, and continues to evolve as technology and education move forward. As a result, each individual corporation has to define for itself what sustainability will mean to them.

Consumers

Smart companies will conduct business in a way that allows their sustainability efforts to be filtered through their customers. Industry is not always the triple bottom line “bad guy.” A company may proactively value sustainability, but these efforts don’t always align with consumer preferences.

Our generation needs a paradigm shift. Consumption in the USA is alarmingly higher than any other country in the world. It is not sustainable and technologies and habits will have to advance to help solve the issue. Protecting our natural resources and promoting sustainable practices will be increasingly important in the coming decades as the population continues to grow.

While sustainability is a main focus for large firms, it is also important to start with the individual, the consumer. When consumers make more environmentally-friendly decisions, the entire world benefits.

Product pricing can be used to encourage consumer behavioral change regarding sustainability efforts. Educating consumers about living more environmentally friendly in their communities and workplaces has proven to be effective at reducing energy consumption. However, it is still not clear whose responsibility it is to provide this education.

Sustainable practices can be different in every situation and depend on variability in geographic location, service being considered, and nation where the business is taking place.

Innovation

Sustainability doesn’t always apply to processes and tools that we are currently familiar with; it can extend to technologies that are just being discovered—technologies that could have serious impact on the health of people, the environment, and communities. Companies that discover technologies with these possibilities must police themselves and assist the government in establishing reasonable regulations to ensure that the technology is not abused.

Sustainable development is often thought of as an altruistic ideology, but it can be a very economic activity for many companies—especially companies that are first to discover and move on novel, more sustainable technologies.

Metrics

How do you measure sustainability efforts/ what is deemed a success? This is different for each company and each individual. It is important for a company to figure out what is the bottom line for them and endeavor to meet that goal.

Corporate sustainability progress is difficult to quantify. However, metrics can be created based on past performance.

To promote accountability, it is important to tie sustainability measures with individual actions when possible.

Communication

Many companies need to get past being defensive in their communications regarding sustainability. Communication is important for sustainability efforts. Not only does it promote buy-in from the shareholders and community, it can also serve as a vehicle to drive change.

It is less about promoting the corporate message about sustainability, but rather making sure that the message is understood.