



HOW TO GREEN YOUR COMPANY

Gay Browne

As a responsible CEO, the health of your company is a daily concern.

It certainly has been for me as CEO of Greenopia. Traditionally, responsibility means looking out for the bottom line, and reporting financial performance to your shareholders if you are a publicly traded company. In today's world, responsibility is taking on a whole new meaning, including looking out for your employees and the natural environment. The viability and marketability of your product or service is a key barometer for a healthy company, of course, but now equally important is creating a healthy environment for your employees, and the environmental impact of your company's operations.

In June of 2017 when Apple, Facebook, Google and Intel urged President Trump to sign the Paris Climate Treaty, two dozen other companies with a reported market cap of \$3.2 trillion joined them—including Levi Strauss & Co, Hewlett Packard, and Morgan Stanley. In addition to the planetary threat of climate change, these forward-thinking CEOs understood that emerging markets, like clean technology and renewable energy offered not only an effective way to slow down climate change but also an abundance of business opportunities with new jobs and economic growth. Not taking advantage of these opportunities, they knew, might also mean a significant loss of future revenue. You can't operate a successful business on an uninhabitable planet, after all.

There are some reading this who may not believe in climate change, in the harmful effects of greenhouse gas emissions, or that toxic pesticides can have a dramatic affect on your children's health. They may not care that President Trump pulled out of the Paris Climate Treaty. I am clearly not in that camp. I learned the hard way when my personal health and that of my family were affected and the causes were linked to environmental toxins. I did not need much more convincing that all those things are real, that we have all been complicit in creating this situation, and that we are at a critical juncture at which we need to take action at all levels.

While my book focuses on what the individual can do to keep toxins out of their daily lives and stay healthy, this extends to what an individual CEO can do as well. Responsible CEOs will be as concerned with the health of their employees and the planet as they are with improving the bottom line. We all can make a difference, but a person at the CEO level of their company has the potential and opportunity to create greater green change than most.

Assess Where You Are

My book begins with a short quiz to determine how green your heart is by asking basic questions such as if there is an air purification system in your home, and how often you purchase single serving plastic bottles. With the help of an outside expert like myself, as the CEO, you can create an internal facing audit with employees and/or an external audit with customers, including such factors as how sustainably you operate and whether your packaging is biodegradable. You could also design such an assessment specifically for the quality of the employees work environment to determine what I call the Environmental Stress Syndrome (ESS) of the surroundings. Unhealthy work environments put undue stress on employees that affects productivity and add to health insurance costs.

Start with an intention. We don't speak much of intentions in the business world, preferring goals or targets, but I believe intention is critical to creating a greener company. Intention is more far encompassing than goal setting. It is a statement of values. Without intention there is no change, and in this case, change is what you are after—whether it is improving your sustainability standards or the altering products you create.

That intention could be that the CEO makes a personal decision to only buy certified USDA organic food for their company, such as Salesforce did last Fall at the Global Climate Action Summit in San Francisco. It was there that they launched of the Step Up Declaration and announced the intention to fight climate change with technology and ensure a positive turning point by 2020. They were not alone. Twenty-one other companies signed on including Bloomberg, Uber, WeWork, and HP.

My initial green intention began in 2005 at a lunch at Michael's restaurant in Santa Monica with John Adams, the founding director of the Natural Resources Defense Council. He spoke passionately about climate change and the work he and his group were doing to combat it. This happened to dovetail with the release of Al Gore's, *An Inconvenient Truth*.

We don't speak much of intentions in the business world, preferring goals or targets, but I believe intention is critical to creating a greener company.

I left that lunch so inspired and certain that I was going to do something to make a green difference. I had set an intention. I just wasn't exactly sure what was next. That intention eventually led me to founding Greenopia, a database of green businesses in 2005 which led to the writing of *Living With A Green Heart*.

Be open-minded. There was a time when the tobacco companies claimed that cigarette smoking was not hazardous to your health. Over time there was statistical evidence drawing direct lines to increased risk of lung cancer and heart disease that proved that was not true. Today every package of cigarettes sold carries a label warning consumers about the potential health hazards of smoking. Similarly, in 2019 there are many who want to reject the EPA's previous finding that indoor air can be two to five times more toxic than outdoor air. Be open minded. While you might not have statistical proof that the indoor air quality in your building is unhealthy, the proof can show up in an increase in employee sick days and increased health insurance claims. In the meantime, even if you are not 100% convinced, something as simple as eliminating plastic water bottles in the workplace and replacing it with a good water filtration system will in the long run be good for the health of your employees and the planet and also prove a cost-saver that has a positive effect on your bottom line.

Be educated. At a time when trust in the media is at a low point and the line between fact and fiction is blurred, the onus is on us to be properly informed when it comes to the environment. The goal of my book is to help you do just that. Written with the individual in mind so they would learn to approach their daily life through a greener lens, I also caution the reader to be aware of tricks such as those who greenwash their products, trying to make them appear healthier than they are and guide them towards what I consider the most reputable resources for the truth.

But much of what is in the book is applicable for the CEO as well. For example, if you're in the process of renovating your offices, you have a choice to create a greener internal environment that promotes the health of your employees and contributes to productivity. Even the smallest of changes can make a difference.

Become a Conscious CEO

In my book, I advocate supporting companies that are committed to operating sustainably and ethically and with values that align with your own. I am a big believer that the more demand there is for products made with fewer toxins and with more responsible methods, the more other companies will follow suit. But I am not alone.

Socially responsible investing is one of the biggest growth areas in financial services, especially among millennials who are increasingly looking at more than just a company's bottom line when making investment choices. This generation looks to put their money in companies whose values match their own, and meet ESG criteria—the environmental, social, and governance standards as defined by industry leaders like John Streur, CEO of Calvert Investments. An environmentally conscious CEO will help the health of the planet and people living on it at the same time they're making their companies more attractive to investors.

Be practical. Every company is working within a budget, which means that not every company can make the same changes. If you are running a smaller company, you may not be able to afford to install a new air infiltration system, but most can invest in the addition of green plants which have been shown to increase the humidity and decrease the levels of carbon monoxide and carbon dioxide in the air. Change takes time and this kind of change begins on the inside before it shifts to the outside.

Be respectful. Not every CEO has as much autonomy in running the company as others do. While Paul Pohlman was able to create a lasting vision for Unilever, I am sure it required a lot of convincing. If you work for a company that doesn't understand why you want to change to more sustainable packaging, your challenge is to demonstrate why this not only makes economic-sense but it will also make them more marketable to the consumer. They may not necessarily buy into the green greater good, but they do understand that people are using their pocketbooks to make their voices heard and support those who are operating ethically and sustainably.

One of my favorite ways to present someone the chance to look at the same problem from a different perspective is to use the phrase I learned from my friend Peter Norton, the former CEO and founder of Norton Anti-Virus Software. "I would like to offer to disagree." I have found it one of the best ways to disarm a potential conflict, yet still be respectful and open up a whole new dialog that can lead to a healthier and better place.

Be hopeful. One of downfalls of a greater awareness of the harm we have been doing to our ourselves and the planet is that things can feel pretty dire. They are. But if we let that consume

Change takes time and this kind of change begins on the inside before it shifts to the outside.

us, we will give up before we even start. That is one of the reasons I advocate that it does not matter how small or big the change is. What matters is that you are taking steps towards making that change and recognizing that you are doing that. It can be as simple as replacing one toxic ingredient from your production process with a greener alternative.

Be compassionate. Kermit the Frog is right; it's not easy being green. Nor is there only one way to do it. As you think about ways to retrofit your company to produce greener, safer products and operate more ethically and sustainability, know that there will be speed bumps, especially in companies that were built on the “old rules” of keeping costs down to satisfy the earning demands of their board, stockholders, and Wall Street—no matter the cost to the environment—as opposed to the “new rules” of societal norms where employee expectations and consumer demands are for a workplace and products that accommodate health and wellness and don't harm the environment and exacerbate climate change.

Be passionate. Not every CEO will be as passionate as Patagonia's Rose Marcario, who pledged at the end of 2018 to donate the \$10 million less the company will now owe to the government due to the new federal tax laws to non-profits who work on issues related to the environment and climate change. Not all will be willing to take a stand of any kind, but we see more and more doing so.

What I have found is that the more educated one becomes about climate change and the environmental issues that are affecting our health and the health of the planet, the more passionate people become about wanting to make a difference.

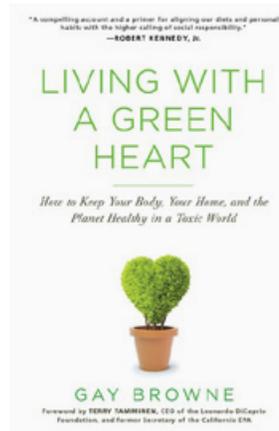
Today's sustainability demands are offering CEOs an opportunity to step into a new era of green leadership. To do so, first, they must be willing to look at their company with a critical new vulnerability, at all aspects of the way their company has done business, their purpose and their mission statement, their operations, their employees, their customers, and their competi-

tion in the market. Secondly, they need to ask themselves if this is the way we should be doing business in today's world and, if not, determine what is the better way and their role in making it happen.

My initial intention after having lunch in Santa Monica with John Adams, started with one small green ripple and has continued to this day, with the creation of Greenopia, writing this book, and now becoming an environmental advisor and consultant for people and companies wanting to find a greener way. I hope setting your green intention may take you and your company somewhere you never thought you'd go, and that once you get there you realize it's the place you needed to be. **What I am certain of, having been on this green path for over fifteen years, is that an intention effects change, and one green intention leads to another and another and that, collectively, is the only way to a more environmentally healthy planet.** 🌱



Info



Ready to dig deeper into this idea? Buy a copy of [Living With a Green Heart.](#)

Want copies for your organization or for an event?
We can help: customerservice@800ceoread.com 800-236-7323

About the author

Environmental pioneer Gay Browne is the world's first and only personal environmental therapist and is the founder of Greenopia, a company dedicated to achieving personal and community environmental health through small and large habit and behavioral adjustments. In 1994, even before the U.S. Green Building Council established the LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) guidelines for environmental building verification, Gay set out to create what she calls "an optimal personal environmental health space." She began designing and constructing the first completely environmentally responsible home of its kind. Gay travels the country speaking on environmental issues, sits on several boards, and holds various chair positions for environmental alliances, arts, and hospital foundations, and women's and school groups.



Powered by the love and tender care of 800-CEO-READ, ChangeThis is a

vehicle for big ideas to spread. Keep up with the latest developments in business books and ideas at 800ceoread.com

This document was created on May 15, 2019 and is based on the best information available at that time.

The copyright of this work belongs to the author, who is solely responsible for the content. This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs License. To view a copy of this license, visit Creative Commons. Cover image from Adobe Stock.

Share this
Pass along a copy of this manifesto to others. →

Subscribe
Sign up for e-news to learn when our latest manifestos are available. →