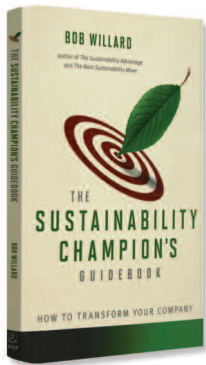


A New Look at Going Green

Review by Chris Lauer



The Sustainability Champion's Guidebook

By Bob Willard

New Society Publishers © 2009, \$19.95,
129 pages, ISBN 978-0-86571-658-2

During Bob Willard's 34-year career with IBM Canada, he became an expert at turning sustainable business strategies into bottom-line business value. In his previous books, *The Sustainability Advantage* and *The Next Sustainability Wave*, he professed the benefits of sustainability and how companies can build commitment for more environmentally sound business practices. In his latest book, *The Sustainability Champion's Guidebook: How to Transform Your Company*, Willard demonstrates how anyone can transform a business into a sustainable enterprise.

The Sustainability Champion's Guidebook is an expertly encapsulated guide for people who want to improve how their companies thrive in an increasingly fragile world. Each two-page fold of the book contains a brief summation of a step toward sustainability on one page and a model or figure that enlarges the scope of that strategy on the opposite page.

Sustainability Intrapreneurs

Willard calls environmentally conscious change leaders "sustainability intrapreneurs." These are the people who are working within their companies to integrate environmental standards, appropriate behaviors and social values into their business processes. Throughout his book, Willard describes the work these sustainability champions must do to shift a company from an unsustainable, linear, "take-make-waste" strategy to a sustainable, circular, "borrow-use-return" business model.

Willard points out that the old "take-make-waste" model violates the four conditions for a sustainable society described by the international sustainable development firm Natural Step.

Unsustainable companies create waste from substances extracted from the earth; from substances produced by society; they over-extract and degrade nature through physical means; and they contribute to abuses of political or economic power so that human needs such as clean air and potable water are not met, .

Borrow-Use-Return

On the other hand, the circular "borrow-use-return" model (borrowed from the book *Natural Capitalism* by Lovins, Lovins and Hawken) offers a sustainable corporate model that responsible companies are using to transform their businesses into sustainable enterprises. This model includes four strategies that can be extended throughout any company and its supply chain.

The first strategy is "radical resource productivity," which includes stretching natural resource productivity to reduce over-harvesting and resource depletion. The second is "ecological redesign," which recognizes that you can't throw anything away, because there really is no "away." The third strategy is a "service and flow economy," which entails replacing goods with services by leasing products and solutions instead of selling them. When one of these leased products becomes obsolete, the producer of that product will then take it back so it can be recycled or remanufactured. The fourth strategy of the "borrow-use-return" model is an "investment in natural capital." This means companies "restore, maintain and expand ecosystems to sustain society's needs and avoid social upheaval and costly regulations," Willard writes.

By showing change champions how to put these strategies into place using leadership practices that have worked in other organizations, Willard helps to turn sustainability theories into direct actions. Along the way, he describes the cultural shifts that need to take place within a company to keep these practices moving forward.

Big Challenges

The biggest challenges facing sustainability champions today are issues concerning energy, climate change, food, water, waste, toxicity, poverty and social justice. Willard shows organizations how to direct the attention of their people to these issues while also providing the leadership skills they will need to become more effective on their journey toward sustainability.

By defining the new behaviors, norms, values, assumptions and beliefs that will help organizations reach their goals quickly, Willard offers sustainability champions a resource to keep them on track throughout their mission.

The Buzz

Notability: ★★★★★
Readability: ★★★★★
Takeaways: ★★★★★
Innovation: ★★★★★
Shelf Life: ★★★★★