

## Some 'BRIEF' Tips for Building a Green Team

By **Aurora Dawn Reinke** - August 7, 2017



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Sometimes, the team that got you to the championship is not the one that can bring home the trophy. This is a well-understood phenomenon in entrepreneurship—the visionary who started the company struggles to deal with the operational complexity of growth and scaling. The same may be true for your sustainability program; it may stall out at the current level of expertise and development.

There's no doubt sustainability is growing in importance in the hotel industry. Major brands are mandating corporate responsibility and environmental management into their standards. Hilton's LightStay and IHG's Green Engage, among many other initiatives, are evidence of this. Complying with such standards is increasingly making sustainability everyone's job, not just the purview of one champion or a green team that meets occasionally.

The team that got you there may not be the team that can take you to the next level, but this doesn't mean firing and replacing everyone. It does require intentional management strategies to grow and evolve the team. There are some tips for building a team that can stay the course; I'll keep it **BRIEF!**

- **Belong.** Many of the industry associations you may already be involved with have a sustainability or green committee, such as the ones at [AHLA](#) or [GBTA](#). If your preferred membership organization doesn't have this, then advocate for it to be added. Take the opportunity to not only learn more about sustainability, but to also be an important contributor and voice on the future direction of sustainability for the industry. Delegate participation to staff who enjoy networking and building relationships.
- **Recruit.** Sustainability programs have sprung up everywhere. New hires always need to learn more about either the function, the industry, or both. You can get the best of both worlds by drawing from the sustainability in hospitality and tourism programs at [Cal State, UNC, Kennesaw](#), and dozens more out there. Or be on the lookout for sustainability concentrations in hospitality programs such as the one at [Kendall College](#).
- **Identify.** Employees generally want to be recognized and rewarded for their efforts. As I learned in a recent employee engagement survey, they also want public recognition for the property. Consider opportunities for rewards and accolades through green hotel publications or certifications, which you can proudly display. This can also set you apart from others; competition can be a powerful motivator to push teams beyond their comfort level. Many regional organizations, such as the [NYC Hotel Association](#), hold contests to reward green behavior.
- **Expand.** Broaden the horizons and scope of current employees by sending them to sustainability conferences and workshops. Give them time in the day to attend one of a myriad of free webinars on global (and local) environmental issues, technical solutions, strategic frameworks, etc. In just the last month, I've attended free webinars on food waste reduction strategies, clean ocean initiatives, green certification benefits, sustainability management systems, and more! Past webinar recordings from [Sustainable Brands](#) and the [American Sustainable Business Council](#) are available online. Investing in employee education is also a great retention strategy.
- **Filter.** The next time you post an opening, search for candidates that have "green" credentials. The International Society of Sustainability Professionals recently launched a [credential program](#). [LEED](#), [ASHRAE](#), and other organizations will certify individuals to be knowledgeable in those domains. The hospitality and tourism industry offers certificates such as [GSTC's Sustainable Tourism Training](#). Any smart candidate will list these achievements on their LinkedIn profile. And perhaps one day AHLEI will have a certification for sustainability professionals in hospitality.

Simple steps can empower and enable your team to take sustainability to the next level. Your sales team can prepare a differentiating response to an RFP with "green" requirements. Your marketing team will have greater confidence and clearer language to tell your sustainability story. Your CFO can address the bank's request for sustainability information (a trend on the rise). Your guest services manager can discern the best way to explain sustainability initiatives to guests and visitors.

By following these practices, you can build an all-star sustainability team.

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