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# **Real Sustainability - Cutting Through The Politics**

I get so tired of hearing about sustainability. It seems I can't turn around without someone throwing the word around.

We're striving for sustainability

Sustainability is our company's core value

Dude, I'm doing it for, like, you know, the environment. You know, sustainability...

The problem is that *sustainability* has become just another phrase that people throw around without truly understanding what it means. It is the latest in a long line of phrases (like *think outside the box*) that people use to sound like they know what they are talking about.

## **It's also a term that has been co-opted**

Environmentalists use it as their mantra, but their usage is vague and isn't clearly thought out. Marketers use it to appeal to environmentalists and to look *green and sustainable*. Conservatives attack liberals about it, and liberals use it to attack conservatism.

Ask them to clearly define sustainable and they falter. Sure, they may try, but what you get is vague. "Dude, it's like, you know, Mother Earth." "It's a left wing attack on capitalism." "We're green and sustainable so you can trust our company and buy from us."

Notice, no one listed above uses it to clearly describe a concept. Their use is solely to support their personal agenda.

## **Don't get me wrong, I passionately believe in sustainability**

The difference is that I've actually thought about what it means and what I believe. I don't use the term lightly.

Webster's Dictionary defines *sustainable* as:

1. capable of being sustained
2. a : of, relating to, or being a method of harvesting or using a resource so that the resource is not depleted or permanently damaged  
b : of or relating to a lifestyle involving the use of sustainable methods

Ok, now we are starting to get somewhere. The only challenge is what are we trying to sustain?

- Are you sustaining trees?

- What about sustaining the fish in the ocean?
- What about sustaining deer and other wildlife?

Or are we trying to sustain:

- Profit margins?
- A competitive advantage?
- Growth?

This is where the conflict comes from. You have two sides fighting over what to sustain. The challenge is that there is no balance. Everyone digs in their heels and blindly fights for their point of view.

## **But no one asks a simple question:**

Why can't we sustain both?

Is it possible to sustain high profit margins while minimizing our carbon footprint? Can we gain a competitive advantage without hurting the environment? Can we make the world a better place (cleaner air and water) while allowing capitalism to flourish?

## **I know that there is a better way**

It's one of the reasons I'm so passionate about energy efficiency. As an energy consultant, I get to help customers help their business while helping the environment. Talk about a great job. I get paid to make the world a better place **and** make my customers more profitable. How do I work this magic? Most of the time it's by doing a commercial or industrial energy audit. I find ways for customers to cut their energy consumption (usually by 20% or more). Not only does this help their bottom line, it reduces the impact on our planet.

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