

The Human Side of Sustainability

Posted on 26 October 2010 by Marcy Murningham



The TakeAway: Corporate sustainability thrives on authentic, ethical relationship management and communication skills, especially in digital environments.

Progress happens when abstract sets of rules and laws meet real world human behavior. Yet all too often, the former gets all the focus, forgetting that rules get implemented by people, which can move the needle forward when done well, or can impede progress when bungled. Take, for example, the SEC's busy Dodd-Frank [rulemaking schedule](#), which extends through next year (though opponents are trying to [hold things up](#) through court filings). Despite the plethora of new rules and regulations, the implementation challenge for corporate and investor boards and management boils down to a human process, subject to individual and collective values, beliefs, motives, and preferences. While empirical data are important for reporting purposes, relationships rule governance and operations, particularly within a networked environment. That's the "[human side of enterprise](#)", as noted MIT Sloan School management guru [Douglas McGregor](#) put it years ago—a truism that's often overlooked, especially when it comes to sustainability.

Three women – **Lucy Marcus**, **Fay Feeney**, and **Elaine Cohen** – work hard to humanize the practice of corporate social responsibility (CSR) and sustainability.

Board Directors and Social Media | What's the formula for sustainability and success? Active, engaged, independent, and interested board members—with diversity a must. "In other words, businesses that are led by boards that reflect the whole breadth of the organization and its stakeholders and their business environment will be much more successful businesses." That's [Lucy Marcus](#)' message in her recent [TEDx talk](#) on the changing role of board directors. Founder and CEO of [Marcus Venture Consulting](#), Marcus serves as a nonexecutive director on several biotech and nonprofit boards, and was named one of Britain's [rising stars](#) in business. Directors, she says, need to understand different types of relationships, both inside and outside the organization, as well as seeing the connections between them. Plus, they should reach out and engage—ask questions. They must know how to listen and genuinely respect the views that they're hearing. Social media outlets – such as Twitter, LinkedIn and Google Alerts – are great sources for keeping current. Nonexecutive board members can foster "open, critical, dynamic and constructive conversation," she says. And it helps to have "a strong, comprehensive board induction program for new directors, and constant retooling for those who have served for some time." You can follow Marcus on Twitter [@lucymarcus](#).

[Fay Feeney](#), CEO of [Risk for Good](#), an advisory firm that helps lead directors "survive and thrive" in the wired world, also strongly advocates for board conversation and digital literacy. She recently spoke about these issues at a [workshop](#) entitled "[Digital Directorship: Do YOU Need Digital Media Expertise?](#)" at the National Association of Corporate Directors (NACD) annual conference. She's also [moderating a panel](#) on the topic this Thursday at the [5th Annual USC Corporate Governance Summit](#). Feeney's Twitter address is [@fayfeeney](#).

CSR and Human Resources | [Elaine Cohen](#)'s new book, [CSR for HR: A Necessary Partnership](#), shows the criticality of the [human resources role](#) in helping to embed a "values-based, strategic CSR mind-set" into an organization's DNA. Based in Israel, Cohen is an expert and active [blogger](#) on CSR and sustainability reporting, with a background in human resources management. She wrote the book from the perspective of two hypothetical HR managers; a [SlideShare version](#) exists online. When asked last month what "one thing" she would change about HR, [she replied](#), "I would get HR to wake up to Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)! It is time." HR

professionals should advance diversity, going green, investing in employee well-being, and upholding basic human rights, she says, rather than being stuck “in their traditional roles of organizational development, recruitment, training, and compensation.” A title of [Greenleaf Publishing](#), the Israeli launch of her book occurs on October 31st at [Israel Corporate Responsibility Conference 2010](#), in Tel Aviv. You can follow her on Twitter [@elainecohen](#).

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