Sustained Efforts

Employees are taking sustainability into their own hands

By Ann Pace

Concerned about the amount of waste generated from the disposal of plastic water bottles at her office, Catherine Sanders took immediate action.

Inside **Intelligence**:

Sanders is a project manager at the Chicago office of investment research firm Morningstar. When she outlined for management the environmental and health benefits of switching from bottled to filtered tap water, she created a ripple effect within the organization.

"My conversation about filtered water opened the door to further discussions about other environmentally friendly initiatives," Sanders says. "Today, I am helping to shepherd several green initiatives as the firm plans to move to new offices."

As Sanders can attest, leadership need not start with senior executives. The *2008 Corporate Sustainability Employee Study* published by Fresh Marketing, a Maryland-based research firm, reports that most employees are looking for ways to put social responsibility in practice at the office. However, only one-third of their businesses are taking sustainability to the heart of the firm.

Photo by Veer

The study reported that 83 percent of companies have not incorporated corporate social responsibility performance into business metrics. In addition, 75 percent of employees say that their employers are not investing in corporate responsibility training. Another 50 percent believe their company is poor at communicating social and environmental concerns.

"It takes much research and investigation to keep up with the changes. It also takes courage and leadership," says Shari Aaron, CEO of Fresh Marketing.

Aaron says that the disparity between employees' values and management's indifference is linked to fear associated with change.

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"Management has been successful most likely because they have followed a path that works. Those leaders who can look a bit more long-term or outside of their current roles are most often the ones who can lead the charge and inspire others to join," she says.

The study provided examples of employees taking action regarding corporate social responsibility.

"Each employee can find a way to add sustainability into their jobs and work on influencing others," Aaron says.

She describes small steps employees can take, such as working with vendors that are certified with the Forest Stewardship Council, a not-for-profit organization devoted to encouraging responsible management of the world's forests. These vendors can serve as resources when ordering paper or recycled products, researching ways to reduce energy costs associated with travel, and using company newsletters to raise awareness about sustainability.

Mike Dupee, head of corporate social responsibility at Green Mountain Coffee, thinks it is imperative to develop a core strategy to unify initiatives to achieve success.

"If the social and environmental work you are doing is not related to your business in a way that is easy to understand and validate, then you run the risk of creating something that is not going to last when times get tough," Dupee says.

GE, HSBC Bank, Intel, J&J, Marks & Spencer, Nike, Patagonia, Starbucks, Timberland, Unilever, and Wal-Mart are companies ranked by employees as leaders in sustainability. They exemplify the concept that sustainability must be a core strategy toward which all employees and business processes work.

Wal-Mart creates "sustainable value networks"—processes outlining how to achieve sustainability in areas such as greenhouse gas, alternative fuels, and waste to help integrate sustainable practices into all parts of the business.

Regarding its core values, Unilever states, "The long-term growth and success of our business goes hand in hand with ensuring a sustainable future for the planet and its people." Computer component manufacturer Intel provides a forum to be a part of the sustainability discussion on its corporate responsibility blog.

Organizations seeking to become global business leaders must seriously consider integrating their own sustainability strategies. Aaron predicts that if the workplace keeps pace with awareness campaigns and new legislation, significant change will occur within the next five years. Those companies that do not go green could be left in the dust.

By the Numbers

- One-third of businesses are taking sustainability to the core of the firm
- 54% of employees feel confused over how environmental and social impacts are addressed or feel they are treated in silos
- 83% of companies have not fully incorporated corporate responsibility performance into business metrics
- 9 of 10 employees link brand reputation to addressing environmental and social impacts
- Half of employees feel their company is poor at communicating social and environmental concerns to key stakeholders
- 75% of employees say their firms are not investing in corporate responsibility training
- Most employees want more education and resources on corporate sustainability since only 1 in 10 feel completely prepared

Source: Fresh Marketing

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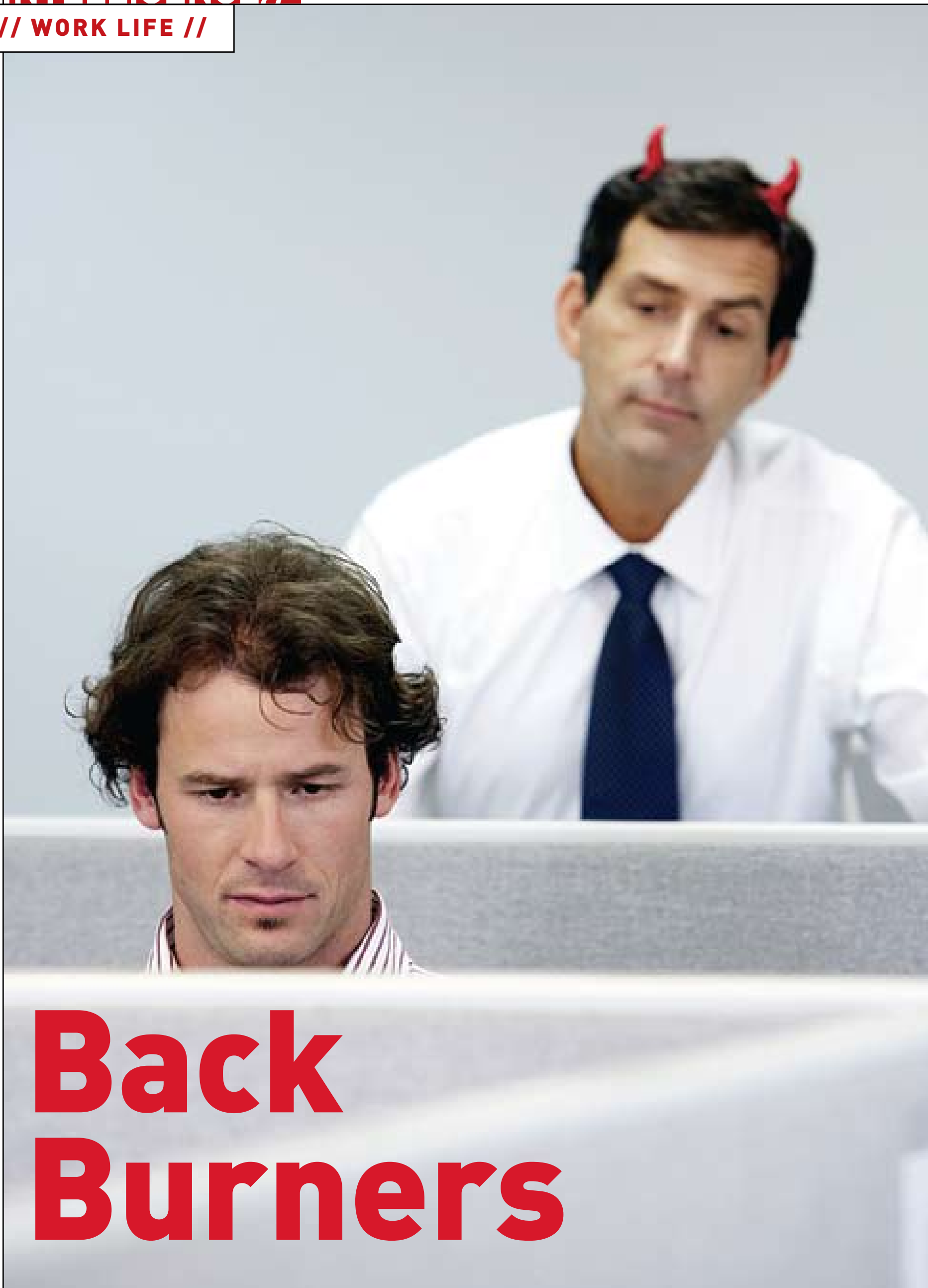

Back Burners

Do not attempt to adjust your office thermostat. If you work in an ultra-competitive field, that sudden blast of heat might be coming from a fellow colleague.

New survey data reports that half of advertising and marketing executives believe that a colleague has actively tried to make them look bad on the job.

The national survey was conducted by The Creative Group, who interviewed 125 senior execs in the advertising field, and 125 marketing executives. Respondents were chosen randomly by the Menlo Park, California-based staffing firm, from 2,000 of the largest companies in each respective business area.

Megan Slabinski, executive director at The Creative Group, believes that the implications are substantial because they represent a no-win state of affairs for all involved.

Those interviewed were also asked to provide their likely response to an associate seeking to thwart them professionally. An overwhelming 70 percent expressed that a one-on-one confrontation would be the best way to handle the situation. Another 10 percent would opt to notify that person's manager.

"Collaboration is essential to innovation and productivity, and it's hard for co-workers who don't trust one another to work well together," she says. "Managers can encourage positive collaboration by rewarding group efforts rather than singling out individual superstars. They also can be on the lookout for bad apples who try to sabotage co-workers, and address these individuals directly."

The Creative Group offers some remedies for defusing tensions. Slabinski recommends finding a mentor to help learn the organization's unwritten rules and identify others' motivations.

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It is also important to take time to cool off after an incident, and approach the person in question with a controlled demeanor. Be sure to examine motives and actions (both theirs and your own) from a few different angles, and make an attempt to speak in person rather than sending an email.

Explain how their actions make you feel, and listen actively to understand their side of the story. Finally, be aware of what situations warrant the involvement of your manager or HR.

"Confronting may be the best route when the situation is relatively minor—someone took credit for your work, stepped on your toes during a meeting, or copied someone on an email that you didn't want to have passed along," Slabinski advises. "When the situation is serious or could be serious, then reporting is in order."

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Photo by Veer

Not TOO Ready to Retire

Employers should be encouraged to know that when the siren sounds for retirement, it does not mean that longtime employees are racing for the door.

In fact, for many employees, it's a life transition that's made with caution and hesitation. The availability of flexible work options may be more than enough to keep today's knowledge worker around for just a little longer.

A 2008 Employee Benefit Research Institute (EBRI) survey of recent retirees found that 63 percent of employees would have found possible job incentives most effective in delaying their retirement if they had known about them within two years of announcing their plan to leave.

"Retirement needs to be something employers focus on now—to have employees come to them with their ideas and to have employers and employees work together in terms of having employees retain skills, mentor other people, and do specific projects so that they are doing something meaningful for the company," says Craig Copeland, a senior research associate at EBRI.

Money was not necessarily the only major incentive for keeping workers from retiring right away. The study measured the effectiveness of 19 different job incentives.

The study was based on responses from 4,981 workers in the aerospace and defense fields who retired in 2003 or later and were between the ages of 55 and 65 years.

Forty-eight percent of retirees said that feeling truly needed for a job assignment would have been extremely or very effective in encouraging them to stay.

Fifty percent of workers said that receiving a full pension while working part time would have been effective in delaying retirement; 44 percent said the same of receiving a partial pension while working part time. Pension regulations necessitate a change in federal law and are the hardest for companies to undertake as work options.

Another 38 percent of employees said working seasonally or on a contract basis would be an effective method for them to delay retirement.

"Sometimes employees didn't feel comfortable asking their employers about flexible work options. It was implied they wouldn't be putting forth their full effort if they worked part-time," Copeland says.

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Pat a Techie on the Back

If you're waiting for an IT troubleshooter to help jumpstart a sluggish desktop, you are not alone. Many organizations are experiencing the same problem.

The challenge of attracting and retaining IT workers is just as tough as it was in the past. Recruiters continue to say that there is a shortage of qualified IT talent.

A recent survey conducted by Robert Half Technology found that 22 percent of chief information officers believe that finding qualified IT workers is somewhat or even more challenging compared with one year ago. The pipeline is running dry, as 52 percent of CIOs cited a real shortage of qualified workers.

Demographic shifts and the changing demands of the technology field are transforming the roles of IT workers. In the past, they may have been viewed as skilled craftsmen, but now they are peers with financial officers and marketing officials.

"The demand is there but not for the traditional worker," says Nina Buik, president of Encompass.

Technology specialists are being asked to play a significant role in launching a new product or service, marketing the organization, and offering ideas about how to leverage technology in future initiatives, according to Buik.

In short, IT workers can no longer hide under the hood. They must be prepared to give presentations and be comfortable among their peers in the boardroom.

In recent years, the interest in IT in the United States has declined, but interest in IT project management has increased. Managers are much younger than in years past.

"The fear of outsourcing has people asking, 'Why should I pursue a degree in this field,'" Buik says.

IT workers need to be able to integrate social media tools with customer relationship management. Podcasts were once considered toys, but they are now standard marketing tools for many organizations with a media arm. IT employees need to be able to think creatively about how to leverage new technologies with the organization as a whole.

Given the expanded expectations of tech workers, organizations need to show appreciation for emerging talent beyond the paycheck. Too often, IT employees are taken for granted.

"IT people are like artists," Buik says. "Recognition means more than compensation. If they are responsible for an innovation, you should demonstrate that to the whole company."

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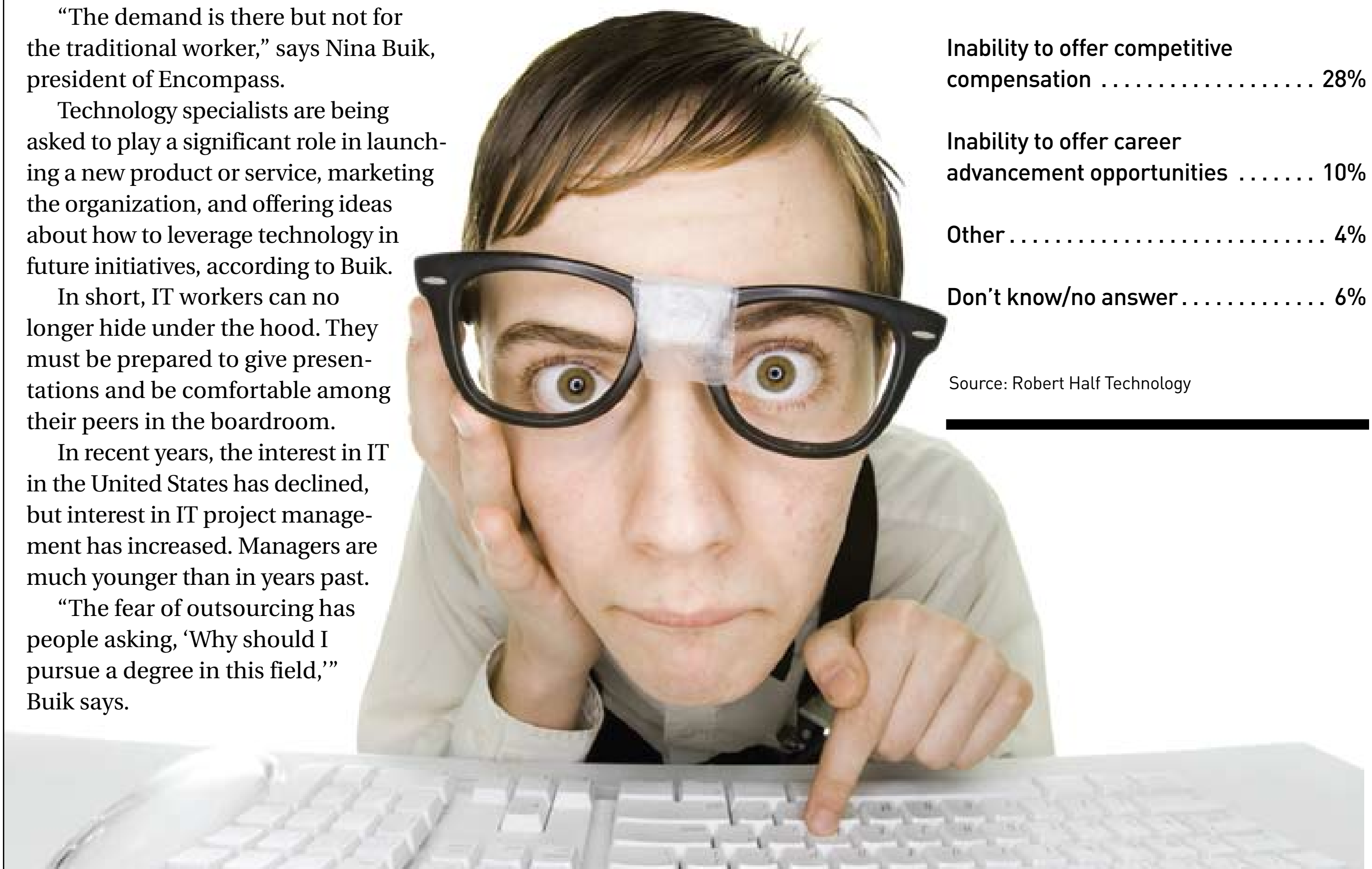

Is it more or less challenging to find qualified candidates for IT jobs compared to 12 months ago?

Much more challenging	10%
Somewhat more challenging	12%
Just as challenging	55%
Somewhat less challenging	9%
Much less challenging	7%
Don't know/no answer	7%

What is the primary cause behind the challenge in finding workers for IT jobs within your company?

Shortage of qualified IT workers	52%
Inability to offer competitive compensation	28%
Inability to offer career advancement opportunities	10%
Other	4%
Don't know/no answer	6%

Source: Robert Half Technology

Photo by Veer

Shaky Confidence

CEO Confidence about Economic Prospects

	2007				2008	
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2
Measure of CEO Confidence	53%	45%	44%	39%	38%	39%
Current economic conditions, 6 months ago	49	49	39	34	26	28
Expectations for economy, 6 months ahead	53	43	44	40	40	43
Expectations for own industry, 6 months ahead	56	43	50	45	47	45
Current conditions in own industry, 6 months ago	53	48	45	44	41	33

Source:The Conference Board

Business leaders are only slightly more hopeful about the economy than they were earlier in the year.

According to The Conference Board's Measure of CEO Confidence, executives who rate the current economy favorably rose to 39 points in the second quarter of 2008, a slight rise from 38 in the first quarter. A score above 50 indicates that a majority of CEOs view the economy positively.

The last time the measure fell below 38 was in the final quarter of 2000 when it was at 31 points.

"CEOs continue to rate current economic conditions as unfavorable, and their short-term expectations suggest this slow growth environment will exist for the remainder of the year," says Lynn Franco, director of The Conference Board Consumer Research Center.

Current economic conditions barely registered an improvement for CEOs, with less than 7 percent stating economic conditions had improved, compared to 3 percent last quarter. In assessing their own industries, business leaders were more pessimistic. Approximately 9 percent claim conditions are better—a decline from 14 percent in the first quarter.

Currently, 24 percent of business leaders expect economic conditions to improve in the next six months, up from approximately 20 percent last quarter. Expectations for their own industries, however, did not improve. Only 20 percent of CEOs anticipate an improvement in the months ahead, down from 23 percent last quarter.

Regarding profit expectations during the next 12 months, 60 percent of executives anticipate increases. Executives engaged in the durable goods industry are the most optimistic, with 73 percent expecting profits to increase. Executives in the nondurable goods industry are second, with 56 percent anticipating a rise in profits.

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On the Run

Workers for North American technology companies are less likely to remain with their present employer than their counterparts in most industries, according to a survey of 3,342 employees by BlessingWhite. Asked if they plan to stay in their current job in the year ahead, little more than half (54 percent) of technology employees said, "Yes, definitely."

Assuming you have a choice, do you definitely plan to remain with your organization through the remainder of 2008?

(Percent of respondents who replied "yes")

Energy and utilities	73%
Insurance	69%
Consumer products	68%
Banking and financial services	65%
Pharmaceuticals or biotech	63%
Government	62%
Academia and higher education	61%
Chemicals and manufacturing	61%
HR consulting and training	60%
Transportation	58%
Legal or business services	55%
Technology	54%
Healthcare	54%
Communications and media	50%
Retail, hospitality, and travel	48%

Source: BlessingWhite