3 Energy Saving Tips Small Businesses Can Try This Earth Day



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Every small business leader I know worries about taxes, hiring and a million other things. There’s a lot to juggle and prioritize just to keep your doors open, let alone scale. It may seem overwhelming to add energy efficiency to your plate, but the early days of your small company are the ideal time to start integrating sustainability into your business model.

As someone who once took a break from corporate America and ran my own small business, I know firsthand that being environmentally responsible is doable even when you still have lots of room to grow.

Implementing these recommendations when you’re still the

person turning off the lights at the end of the day can create a foundation of environmental awareness you can lean on for generations to come.

1. Making greener choices

The biggest source of greenhouse gas emissions is transportation at 27%. This includes your company cars, trucks and other vehicles. So one of the most impactful things you can do for the environment is to switch to electric vehicles (EVs) wherever possible. Although you might pay more upfront for an EV, you'll likely save over the long haul in both fuel and maintenance costs. If you do a lot of long-distance traveling, look for airlines with carbon-neutral flights to make your air travel more sustainable.

Next, check out where you're spending energy. Take light bulbs. Are you using low-energy bulbs, or are you just going to your local club warehouse and getting the cheapest bulbs on the shelves? Just like with EVs, upfront costs can seem offputting. But when you do the math, the products with the high initial sticker prices — like low-energy light bulbs — often are the best long-term money savers.

Evaluate your energy provider, too. Just because a company offers energy doesn't mean it's an energy-friendly business — coal and solar both can provide power, but solar is cleaner and cheaper.

Take note of your furniture and other office supplies, as well. One office chair or sofa can be much harder to produce or recycle than another. As you make swaps, let everything in the office advertise your environmental values for you. Your water fountains can display how many gallons of water are saved. Your coffee can be responsibly sourced. Your paper can be recycled. You sacrifice nothing in terms of functionality, but the fact you use a different approach to even the little things makes a statement to every employee and guest.

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2. Bringing employees on board

Most people respond more to positive reinforcement than they do to negative reinforcement. So offer as many environmental incentives to your employees as you can. At Merchants Fleet, we offer $2,500 to workers who buy EVs, with additional reimbursement for chargers.

Can’t spend $2,500+ per incentive? Just look for one that fits your budget and environmental goals. In addition to the EV option, we donate $10 in each employee’s name to a charity that plants trees in Kenya. The employees can see exactly where their trees are planted through video.

We also support environmental activities and clubs on-site, such as our composting group. To get these kinds of activities going, see if you can spring for their supplies or slot time off of the workday for them to go participate. Getting people to volunteer in the community is free, too. Options are everywhere.

The most important thing is to have open conversations about environmental responsibility and things you can do. Suppose you walk into a meeting and tell your staff you just read a great article about a company that’s doing great things for the environment, and you’d love to implement certain tactics from the article, such as evaluating the office. Team members can take on the tasks they feel comfortable with, and at the end of the meeting, everybody leaves feeling empowered and as though the environmental goals are one step closer to becoming reality.

The more you make environmental consciousness a part of your day-to-day operations and form good habits around it, the more people will get behind environmental responsibility as part of

your culture.

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3. Partners for the cause

The saying goes that you become the company you keep. So if you want a powerful reputation as a company that does right by the environment, make sure the people around you don't make you guilty by association. By the same token, there are companies that may be larger and established enough to be a little more public with their stances. If you align with them, you draft off of their brand equity. Chances are, you have several business partners, such as your legal or PR firms or certain suppliers. Ask yourself if they align with where you are headed as a company environmentally. Do they share the same ESG values you do?

You can also build your environmental reputation by going local where you can. Local products and services don't have to be transported, which means a smaller carbon footprint as well as cost savings for your business. A simple place to start is with meals. If you have a company lunch, cater from a family-owned shop in your neighborhood rather than a big-name national chain. Having you as a client can make a big difference in their ability to stay afloat, and you'll get the service you need in a green way.

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If you want to grow responsibly, plant the seed

Being a green company doesn't have to be complicated, costly or reserved for huge businesses. You can build environmental practices into your organization from day one, as long as you

are willing to plant the seed for your employees. It’s part of your role as a leader to inspire all the people around you not only to do their job but to be part of the fabric of the company. Once you open up the conversation and set the example, let them take that environmental seed and water it.

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