

SUSTAINABILITY

Fans the Flame of

INNOVATION

BY / ELEANOR HUNT



FROM THE GO-GREEN rallying cry of the 1990s promoting energy and water conservation efforts to the recent rise of Tesla and electric vehicles, sustainability drives new ideas, products and business practices in an effort to limit the impact on natural resources.

Sustainability first centered on energy and water efficiency, says Jonathan Kraatz, executive director, Texas Chapter of the U.S. Green Building Council, a nonprofit that promotes environmentally responsible design and construction. Innovating with an eye on sustainability led to the inclusion of motion and daylight sensors, LED technology, high-efficiency toilets, low-flow faucets and more in construction projects.

Sustainability nurtured breakthroughs in the design and construction of Baylor University's Paul L. Foster Campus for Business and Innovation. As a result, the project earned the prestigious Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Gold certification.

Kraatz, who presented the award at a ceremony on campus April 28, says, "It's a great facility that leverages sustainable materials and local resources. The landscape flourishes even with low-water maintenance, and access to daylight is a key component. Research shows that daylight improves cognitive function in educational and workplace environments."

A CURRICULUM OF SUSTAINABILITY

In that eco-friendly building, Josh Strakos, clinical assistant professor of Management, teaches a distribution management class in which students examine the sustainability levels of products and services.

"My students have a sustainability mindset, because they grew up in a culture with environmental issues at the forefront," Strakos says. "In class, they review a company's or product's sustainability levels in three categories: social, economic and environmental.

These areas capture ways we want to act and evaluate the level of sustainability that goes into the use, design and manufacture of a product, service or company."

Strakos, who retired from the U.S. Air Force as a logistics officer with a fuels management background, intends to develop the course so students work on a real-world project or with a company in a learning or consulting capacity.

"I want students to delve into how a company can integrate sustainable practices into every part of their supply chain," he says. "We're all subject to stewardship of the resources God has given us. Making the best of these resources will drive us into sustainability."

SPARKING GREEN-MINDED IMPROVEMENTS

Pulp and paper company Georgia-Pacific looks at its business through a sustainability lens, according to Chief Sustainability Officer William Frerking. The company defines sustainability as actions it takes to achieve a future outcome.

"We use sustainability as a mental model to think about how we can make better decisions about impacting people, nature and the market. We also use it as a way to communicate what we're doing that people care about," he says.

Sustainability helps inform product improvements. Georgia-Pacific reengineered its Compact® bath tissue without disposable cores, paper roll wrap and the box, which the company replaced with plastic wrap. The revamp eliminates the wood fiber previously used. "This illustrates how sustainability caused us to think about how we improve a product that the marketplace values," Frerking concludes.

Innovation through the prism of sustainability is bringing efficiencies and resource savings as eco-minded businesses like Georgia-Pacific are proving. Their efforts are stimulating new products, processes and services that resonate with consumers. It appears that companies also profit when fewer resources are required in their manufacturing supply chains. Best of all, the benefits extend to future generations, which will count on the availability of the Earth's finite natural resources to sustain their lives. 

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