

# The mindset for sustainable business

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The right mindset is crucial because it determines what you see, how you react, and the opportunities you can spot. By upgrading your mindset about sustainability and business, you significantly increase your chances of creating a successful business that also makes the world a better place.

There are many misconceptions that hinder most companies from truly succeeding with sustainability – both in business terms and in making the world a better place. However, sustainability is actually an opportunity to improve and renew existing business processes.

## Start and end with business

We are so accustomed to seeing sustainability primarily as a technical discipline, often driven by people with a strong environmental or technical background. Efforts are identified based on their environmental relevance. But if you think it is merely an environmental and technical discipline, you are missing the point.

When done right, sustainability often yields results such as cost reduction, increased sales, higher customer loyalty, and attracting talent, just to name a few. These are all classic management focal points.

Therefore, start by identifying the three to five biggest challenges in your

company and for your core customers. Let that be the starting point and then use sustainability to find new ways to solve these problems. This way, sustainability efforts immediately gain a solid strategic transformation, greater focus, and higher value. It's about creating business with built-in environmental impact.

## Create positive impact

Sustainability almost always involves reducing a company's negative impact on the environment, and often the ultimate goal is zero – zero CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, zero waste, zero everything. As a businessperson, you wake up in the morning to create more! More revenue, more profit, more products, more growth, more jobs... It is therefore not surprising that countless business leaders over the years have concluded that business and sustainability do not go hand in hand.

When sustainability becomes a matter of doing less, avoiding, settling, it resembles the discussions we have during economic downturns, triggering our fear of losing things. It simply triggers an unconscious fight against and holding on. Furthermore, it is difficult to recruit people to an agenda that involves giving up something and, in general, being “a little less bad.”

If you turn it around, it becomes much more interesting. Frame it, think about it, and aim to create a positive impact. When you use sustainability to strive for a new and better version of what you sell, it opens up creativity and taps into the drive we humans have always had to make tomorrow better than yesterday.

Another reason we should create a positive impact is that even if we manage to stop all emissions of CO<sub>2</sub>, for example, it still won't ensure that our children will have conditions to live and thrive under that are even slightly better than what we have had.

The good solution is one that goes beyond being slightly less bad. In one way or another, it leaves the world a slightly better place.

## Green is cheaper

How many times have you encountered a “green” product that is more expensive? You probably experience it daily. Just go to the supermarket and compare organic products to conventional ones. We also encounter products where the “sustainable” version has a higher price. It is so widespread that it is considered an unspoken truth, and often it actually takes hold from the inception of a development project.

Whether you believe that the sustainable solution will be more expensive or cheaper, you are most likely to be right.

There are numerous examples of “greener” products that require fewer materials, less energy, and/or provide higher value or value over a longer period. These are just some of the results of smarter resource utilisation. So, there is no basis for claiming that an environmentally better product must be more expensive.

Does that mean I’m saying that a new and environmentally better solution will always be cheaper? No, it doesn’t. Some things will be more expensive either because they require something more or simply because we actually pay the price for the materials and their impact, without shifting part of the bill onto our children.

Let your starting point be that a “green” solution has a lower or equivalent price to conventional ones from a total cost perspective.

## A new way of doing business

Another widespread misconception is that it is too risky to tamper with the core business. The reality today is that it is too risky if you don’t.

Continuing with business as usual and implementing some “green” projects in smaller areas of the business is high-risk, even if what you’re doing is really good and can serve as a flagship project.

People will see through it. They will see that you are still part of the problem, even if you have made changes such as altering your packaging, acquiring electric cars for management, or installing solar panels. You expose yourself to significant risk of being accused of greenwashing. You need to start developing a new and better version regardless of what you deliver to the market. A version that, in some way, contributes to making the world a better place.

*Sustainability is not a project. It is a different way of thinking, developing, and conducting business.*

# Be open, transparent, and collaborative

Many companies keep their sustainability efforts close to the vest. They do this out of fear that some will scrutinise them and criticise them for doing too little – pointing out the flaws. They also do it because they believe that if the company is working on something exciting, it will likely be copied.

This is an outdated approach that no longer works. Today, there is a need to be open, transparent, and collaborative. When you are open and transparent, it creates credibility when you communicate. But it also allows those who may have a solution that can accelerate your development to recognise that you have a need and come to you.

Furthermore, by being open and transparent, you can inspire more people, and we can all avoid reinventing the wheel all the time. We don't have time for anything else with all the changes we need to achieve individually in this decade.

The complexity and magnitude of the climate crisis, for example, mean that no one can create the right solutions alone. The transition to sustainability is a team sport that requires collaboration.

These are the five areas where I see that mindset makes the biggest difference—either positively or negatively. By embracing the five constructive alternatives and implementing them, you significantly increase the likelihood of achieving business success with your sustainability efforts.

Jasper Steinhausen is the founder and CEO of *Business With Impact* and author *Making Sustainability Profitable*.

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