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**Four steps to engage staff in sustainable development**

30 March 2009 4:32 PM

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Because each location, property and hotel staff is different, engagement in a sustainable development strategy is adaptable. Sustainable development is a pattern of resource use that aims to meet human needs while preserving the environment so these needs can be met in the present and indefinite future.



Hervé Houdré

No one should think 100 percent of a staff will be committed to a sustainable development strategy immediately—or even later—because one has to consider such projects as an extraordinary engagement from the hotel core business, and some employees may not be attracted to that. However, there are certain basic rules to include in a sustainable development strategy to entice employee participation.

**1. Communication**

The obvious and most important one is communication. An SD strategy must be well prepared and its goals communicated to the ownership, management company and

executive committee first, so the stakeholders buy into it and support it. It's important to highlight the advantages such a strategy offers:

- To the shareholders and management company, an SD strategy helps the property save costs and generate recognition and revenue;
- To the managers and employees, the triple bottom line keeps them focused on delivering profit while taking care of the community and environment and engaging them in something bigger than routine work. It helps develop ties and build a strong family of colleagues around common goals. Moreover, SD is a perfect opportunity to connect people - who otherwise never have an opportunity to do so - to projects that bring different professions together.

A good way to start is to look at a PowerPoint presentation demonstrating what SD is about, what countries are doing in this matter, the corporate responsibility strategies of large companies such as General Electric, Coca Cola, Rank Xerox, Chevron and what the hotel industry has achieved. This information is available online. It may be interesting to conclude with what the local authorities or businesses are doing and what a company and hotel already have achieved in terms of environmental protection and community service.

To show the seriousness of such a strategy, include it in the mission statement and values of the property and introduce it to potential employees during the interview process to trigger a conversation and engage the employees from the beginning of their association to the hotel. A great opportunity to show concretely what it's all about is to integrate one project into the orientation program—cleaning a park or river, for example.

**2. Committees and Champions**

Once the presentation has been made to the managers and employees, ask what they'd like to see included in their property's strategy. Create committees that will consolidate all suggestions under the triple bottom line concept:

- Profit: How to manage energy costs better; how to develop recognition of the SD strategy through PR and sales.
- People: Basic community service such as food, clothes, toys, blood drives and other projects that involve taking care of a local community.
- Environment: Involvement in local restoration of parks, rivers, lakes; taking care of the biodiversity, et cetera.

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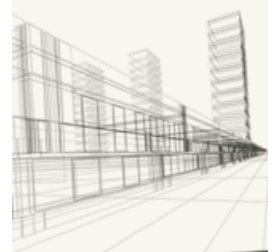
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Then, nominate committee leaders or champions and organize regular meetings around the chosen topics. All committee champions should meet once a month under the responsibility of the hotel SD champion, who spearheads the entire program. If it's in a small hotel, the general manager can fulfil that role; otherwise, ask a manager to volunteer. It's important all people involved as champions be motivated and dynamic to rally a maximum of colleagues around each of the projects.

### 3. Roadmap and measurements

When the committees are created, the initiatives should be embedded in a five-year roadmap that can be explained to the staff easily during a town-hall meeting. Committee meetings should take place bimonthly to focus on the objectives. It's important to define the measurements of the projects so everyone—involved or not—can judge its advancement. All low-hanging fruits, such as changing bulbs to CFLs, better waste management, buying environmentally friendly products, etc., should be addressed right away and considered quick wins that will motivate everyone and show the task isn't tedious. Obviously, the general manager must be engaged in the whole process. The employees' dedication depends on the leader's commitment.

### 4. Recognition

Recognition is essential. Every victory must be celebrated and communicated internally and externally when it's a major one. Employees are proud of their achievements but enjoy them more when they're recognized publicly. Awards can be handed out the same time as the employee of the quarter/year awards. Team awards add spirit to the whole enterprise because they bind individuals together and create a competition within the hotel. It's important to apply this to external awards, too, and, hopefully, win them because employees will relate to them more easily and will be proud to communicate them in their own sphere.

A good SD strategy isn't the achievement of one person, but the result of the commitment of many in the property. It binds the employees together in a different situation and around different objectives. It makes them much more emotionally involved with the hotel and helps reduce employee turnover. Employees are thankful to the management for giving them an opportunity to make a difference in the world and their own life. They're the ones who eventually make SD part of the hotel culture.

Hervé Houdré began his tenure as general manager of the Willard InterContinental Washington D.C. in 2004. He is recognized for introducing refinements that impact profit and increase market share. Under his leadership, the Willard InterContinental has embarked on a sustainability program, Willard InterContinental - The Next 100 Years. Houdré, who has written a white paper, Sustainable Hospitality© : Sustainable Development in the Hotel Industry, and his team have put into place a five-year roadmap that defines and quantifies the mid-term SD goals for the hotel. The hotel published its first GRI Standard Sustainability Report available at [www.willarddc.com/sd](http://www.willarddc.com/sd)

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