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**Give up giving up! Go sustainable!**

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Three years ago, except for officials from a few hotel companies or resorts, not many hospitality professionals were talking about going green or being sustainable. Since Hurricane Katrina and the movie "An Inconvenient Truth," however, it has become fashionable to develop a green strategy for the good of the planet, and we should all be congratulated for that.

Environmental protection

Unfortunately, the current economic crisis seems to have encouraged the "green skeptics" to stop all efforts or considerably reduce the scope of their engagement for cost-saving reasons. It seems that we have not yet proven that reducing one's carbon footprint automatically reduces costs. I would like to refer the reader to a [previous article](#), which explains all the low-hanging fruit that one can harvest while decreasing operational expenses.



Hervé Houdré

I choose to talk again about the great opportunity we have to balance sustainability and keep focus on expense management because I fear many will find it too easy to give up before having really started. If I had one good reason to give hoteliers to persevere, it would be the following: Be convinced that our most valued stakeholders, the customers, will not be reducing their expectations; on the contrary, they will ask for more and more sustainability in their hotel choices.

It seems that other industries have recognized that companies involved in corporate responsibility have had, for the most part, better financial results and today find it [still good for business](#) to keep their sustainable development strategies running, even

during a tough economic downturn. The profit line is extremely important and should remain the most critical bottom line because without profit, businesses would go downhill and eventually die. Nonetheless, to have a balanced business model, all companies should integrate the triple bottom line (people, planet, profit) in their strategy, rain or shine, and stick to their best practices.

If there is anything that should keep parents and grandparents awake and wondering what good they can do for their children, it is to [global warming](#), which, by all accounts, is a major threat to the planet for generations to come. Responsible business executives should stop thinking they cannot do anything to combat this and admit that quite the opposite, they can, and they hold an enormous responsibility.

Social Responsibility

With all the green initiatives being launched in 2008, it became apparent that the "planet" took over the "people" part of the triple bottom line. An economic crisis such as the one we are going through is tougher on those who have lost their jobs or who were not doing well to begin with. Therefore, this is the time to give attention to the social responsibility side of sustainable development, which does not automatically cost much at the hotel level. One only needs to be committed and creative. First and foremost, we are responsible to our employees and their families, and in these uncertain times that is truer than ever. However, we can still take care of others around us locally, nationally and internationally.

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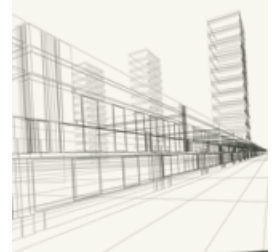
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Employees can give their time and effort to take care of community initiatives such as food/toy/blood drives; participating in AIDS or cancer walks; visiting ill children or older people in a hospital; helping raise funds for a hospital or to give access to clean water and sanitation to poor families in their own country or to schools in developing countries. Staff also should be encouraged to donate their time outside of work to causes that are important to them.

As long as it is seriously measured and documented, hoteliers should not hesitate to ask their guests to participate in certain sponsoring activities on a voluntary basis. Imagine what one dollar per room per night could bring to a fundraiser. Another approach is to partner with vendors or other organizations in order to develop a stronger relationship, which usually will result in a more substantial donation and impact.

Hoteliers are a very competitive breed and as much as I think sustainable development should be implemented for genuine reasons, if I can put forth a final argument, it is that SD brings a good competitive advantage. It definitely offers a lot of exposure and greatly improves the image of a property.

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

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