

**Featured Stories****Houdré: Implement a 'sustainable' strategy**

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By Hervé Houdré

HotelNewsNow.com columnist

29 August, 2005: Hurricane Katrina hits Louisiana. 24 May, 2006: Al Gore's "An Inconvenient Truth" documentary is released in New York and Los Angeles. Green was not a very popular color before these two events took place, but it seems that they have opened the eyes of the American public to the causes and consequences of global warming. Today, no one can grab a magazine or newspaper without reading an article about going green. But we must look farther than simply going green because this will not be sufficient to improve our impact on the planet, its people, and most importantly, on future generations' well being. We must also take care of the communities that are suffering around us and around the world.



Hervé Houdré

Sustainable development presents a holistic approach to these issues by offering a strategy that embraces the "3 Ps" of profit, people and planet, focusing us on being economically viable and socially and environmentally responsible.

**Strategy starters**

Our industry has an opportunity to make a difference and be responsible. Hotels carry enormous accountability by producing vast amounts of waste and consuming lots of energy as well as benefitting from local communities. To counter this, many hotels now are thinking about how to best integrate sustainable development into their strategy.

The foundation of such a strategy is a total commitment from the general manager or head of the company, who must be genuinely convinced of the importance of SD and willing to make it a success. Then the strategy must be endorsed by two of the main stakeholders of the hotel: the ownership and the management company. Our most important stakeholder, the customer, will not only understand, but appreciate the efforts demonstrated by the hotel.

**Implementation process**

There are no specific guidelines, but there are some basic elements to ensure a successful implementation, starting with employee engagement. Communicating with employees is extremely important so they understand, adhere to and drive the project. Not all employees will be engaged immediately, but they all must be made aware of the implementation of the strategy. The best way, if possible, is to have a third party come and speak to them in a town hall meeting. Otherwise, prepare a presentation with topics that are important to you such as global warming, health and hunger in the world, education, water issues, or more local issues about the environment and the community. The Web is a good source of information to prepare such a presentation.

**Employee involvement**

Some of your managers and employees will come naturally to you and offer to be involved in future projects. They can create committees around various topics of interest to them. These can be subdivided into projects focused on eco-products purchasing, energy management, environmental actions, community actions, education, health, etc. One person should become the sustainable development champion and ensure that all committees are meeting at least once a month and develop action plans.

Once the committees are formed, they should develop an sustainable development statement and values for the property.

**Roadmap – measurements**

Measurements are extremely important so that everyone feels that it is not about "green washing" or "green marketing," but genuine care for the environment and the community. A suggestion is to develop a five-year roadmap that outlines all actions that will be undertaken and sets goals and deadlines.

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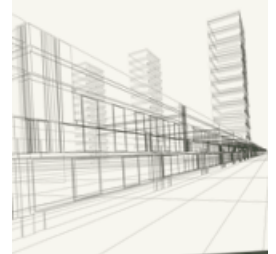
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- 2/20/2009 - Boston Globe Travel Show
- 2/22/2009 - BITAC Food & Beverage
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What ideas should be developed? Most importantly, they must be the ideas of the team so that there is more commitment from everyone to follow through. The second important parameter is that the initiatives should be focused on local projects. People relate more to them and they help a better integration of the hotel into the community. Once the program is well under way, national and more global issues can be integrated in the plan.

**Economic prosperity:** reduction of energy costs, development of a sustainable development image to gain clients (communication to companies that share the same culture).

**Social responsibility:** support to local charities, employees' engagement in the community, developing diversity/inclusion, employees' education & development, fair-trade purchasing, promoting local farming/craft industry, increasing guests' awareness, "adoption" of a class or a school.

**Environmental protection:** water conservation, waste reduction, fluorescent lighting, property energy audit and capital expenditure follow-up, purchase of renewable energy, carbon offset, only sustainable species served in food-and-beverage menus, use of organic products, paperless environment, cleaning of lakes/parks/streets, planting trees, reduce-reuse-recycle program, establishment of a green day/week around Earth Day, rooms "greening," habitat and species protection, conservation information to customers and employees, green roof, green labeled products purchasing, solar panels, gray water use.

**Certifications/awards.** It is important, when feasible, to apply for certifications such as Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design or LEED EB (existing buildings), ISO 14001, Green Seal, etc., and for awards, which motivate everyone. It proves your commitment and helps keep you and the teams focused on achieving your goals.

### **Follow up**

Once the committees are formed and a roadmap established, the general manager and the sustainable development champion should ensure that actions are taken. Start with the low-hanging fruit and continue work on more ambitious targets. All actions should be measured in terms of cost reduction (fluorescent lighting can reduce your electricity bill by up to 20 percent), decrease of carbon footprint (waste management) or improvement of image (community service) and increase of revenue (green meeting, new "sustainable" clients).

#### **Communication**

Do not hesitate to communicate internally as well as to your stakeholders and to the media when you have important results to show. It will be good for the image of your property but more importantly, it will entice others to follow the same path.

Go on, be sustainable!

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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