

## Working “Green”

by Marianna Paulson

There is no doubt about it, green is BIG. My mother emigrated from Holland after WW2 and the necessities of living through war times was a lesson she did not easily forget. She was green long before green was 'in'.

The 3 R's – Reduce – Reuse – Recycle played a prominent role in our upbringing, although at the time, we had no idea that's what we were doing – to us, it was just how we did things.

So, whether you work in a small home-based business or in an office downtown, or anything in between, you can do your part to make a difference. Remember that new habits, regardless of what they are, take time to build. In order to change, you need structure – a way to anchor your new green behaviour. Start small and celebrate your successes. If you forget, ask yourself how you can do better next time around.

Information is power – there are many resources available to get you started: everything from helpful websites, to books, magazines and even professionals who can assist you with your lifestyle changes. Your children can also contribute – they have likely studied the environment in school and would be more than happy to help you implement your green office practices. It's also a great way to introduce family togetherness by having you work together to make changes for the betterment of the earth.

So, what can you do?

### Kitchen

In order to work, we need energy and that means food & water. A great deal of waste is generated by the way in which we eat. Consider making more meals from scratch – I'm not my mother's daughter for nothing! It doesn't have to be complicated – big pots of soup or stew that can be frozen and re-heated.

When you're bringing meals to work, forget the paper bags and plastic wrap – there are plenty of reusable & refillable containers out there. Remember that green is big, and now, more than ever, attractive options are available.

- storage for people so that they can bring in their own dishes and utensils
- supply dish soap or a dishwasher (water & energy efficient, of course!)
- for guests, have available either mugs with the company logo or biodegradable ones
- have dishcloths & dishtowels or bring them from home
- use paper towels & napkins made from recycled materials

### Paper & supplies

The best place to start is with the first R which is reduce. Use less – remember that in order to produce, package and ship items there is always an environmental cost. The less you use – the less of a cost. Next is Reuse - invest in a stamp: “RECYCLED” - stamp this on envelopes/boxes/paper so that the receiver knows that you are committed to the environment. Start a trend and make it easy to be green – Kermit will be happy!

- refillable items – pens/pencils/toner
- avoid note pads – make your own from all that scrap paper
- print on both sides & increase the margins

- plain paper fax – not thermal (non-recyclable)
- white boards instead of flip-charts
- re-use name tags, bubble chips, envelopes and boxes
- shred paper and re-use as packaging
- auctions are good places to find used office equipment at a fraction of the cost
- donate equipment to good-cause - non-profits/schools

### Building

Small things do make a difference. Again, how I grew up has come into play. Turn off the lights when you're not in the room – turn off or unplug equipment – they do drain energy even if they're not on.

- have an energy and water audit done to see where & how you can be more efficient
- switch to eco-friendly cleaning supplies
- install motion sensor lights in washrooms
- indoor plants naturally clean the air. Some excellent choices are: spider plant, areca palm, reed palm, dwarf date palm, boston fern, janet craig dracaena, english ivy, australian sword fern, peace lily, rubber plant, weeping fig, philodendron, bamboo palm, snake plant (mother-in-law's tongue, chrysanthemum)

### Travel

Pretend you live in the country far from town. We planned our trips into town very carefully - “gas is expensive, donchaknow!” Of course, it was money, not fuel that drove that comment. If you are fortunate enough to work from home, you are already making a difference.

- See if you and your colleagues could have staggered start-times, avoiding the idling in rush hour traffic
- car pool
- transfer to branches closer to home
- transit (perhaps your employees could provide a subsidy)
- bigger offices provide showers for those who arrive on their own power
- reward drivers who have the best fuel consumption when making deliveries (companies help monitor this)

### Other

- implement phone or email registration
- share magazine subscriptions – library – barter system
- website for employees to buy/trade/give away
- on-site fitness programs
- recycle & compost – start a community garden

If you work in an office, solicit ideas from your colleagues – the 2 heads are better than 1 philosophy! For those who thrive on competition, make it into a company-wide challenge. Perhaps the winner can get what everyone wants more of these days – some time off – even if it's getting to go home an hour earlier!

One thing to consider when going green is the impact on your own health. Not everything green is always as good for the body as 'they' say it is. In other words, do your research. Life is a balancing act, as is the implementation of the environmental choices you make.

Set your intention – look for ways that you can make small changes which then lead to bigger changes. How many of you have habits you've tried to quit? Not that easy, is it? That's because it's something you've done countless times, which has then become stored in your emotional memory, the amygdala...it's like being on automatic pilot. Do you have to consciously think how to drive your car? No – you do that, often while talking to someone else. This is called being unconsciously competent. Remember learning to ride a bike and how awkward that was? Now, you likely hop on and without even thinking about it.

You know you're on your way when you automatically take the shopping bags into the store with you, instead of leaving them in your car!