

Practice Management

Going Green In a Small Firm: *Is it for you?*

by Andrew T. Bockis

Have you ever wanted to do something but had no idea how to begin? Not knowing how to do something often acts as an easy excuse for putting it off. It happens to all of us.

My wife and I had been wanting to install a ceiling fan in our house for months. Not having done that work before, we kept putting it off. Yet after we did the research and realized how easy it was to install, we wondered why we put it off for so long.

I'm sure each of us has a similar example. As it turns out, the notion of environmental sustainability might just fall into that category. What is sustainability? It's development that meets present-day needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

In May of this year, the PBA gave the green light to the PLUS (Pennsylvania Lawyers United for Sustainability) Program. Designed for Pennsylvania lawyers and law firms by PBA's Environmental and Energy Law Section, the PLUS Program gives us an opportunity to publicly demonstrate our commitment to sustainability.

But where should we start? A recent McKinsey & Company study of nearly 2,000 executives from companies representing a wide range of industries and regions found that 72 percent of those companies felt sustainability was "extremely" or "very" important. But only 29 percent of the companies felt that they had successfully integrated sustainability into their business practices.

Perhaps not surprisingly, one of the main reasons the study identified as to why so many businesses don't actively address sustainability in their operations is that many of them have no clear definition of what sustainability is. That said – *and this is the important part* – over 75 percent of the executives responding to the survey saw sustainability as something creating real value.

This shouldn't come as a surprise. People have evolving sensibilities. These days, with

greater access to information, greater accountability is unavoidable. Just 15 years ago, very few coffee drinkers paused to think about the farmers who grew coffee beans (aside, perhaps, from recalling the fictional Juan Valdez's appearance in an occasional commercial). Today, many people are willing to pay a premium for coffee with a Fair Trade seal.

As a recent *Harvard Business Review* cover article summed up the situation, consumers "know everything about your company – not just its carbon emissions but its countless other 'invisible' effects on the globe. That has changed the rules of business forever."

Now, more than ever, companies are taking ownership over the once-invisible impacts their actions have on others. And many of our clients are facing the issues related to living in a transparent world.

Where does the PBA fit in?

In 2009, PBA's Environmental and Energy Law Section formed a committee to develop a program aimed at providing Pennsylvania attorneys and law firms with an opportunity to publicly demonstrate their commitment to sustainability in their professional practices. The committee developed the PLUS Program in response to requests from within the PBA.

The PBA PLUS program is modeled after similar programs by the California, Oregon, and Massachusetts Bar Associations. Closer to home, the Philadelphia Bar Association and the Greater Philadelphia Green Business Program have launched their own sustainability initiatives.

Using input from other PBA sections, the Environmental and Energy Law Section developed a list of guidelines at the heart of the PLUS Program. These guidelines cover five separate areas: energy savings, paper reduction, recycling and waste reduction, transportation, and sustainable purchasing.

The guidelines offer program participants suggestions and provide specific examples of

how to make a law practice more sustainable. They stretch from straightforward suggestions, such as installing motion detectors in offices and ensuring your office copiers and printers have an automatic duplex option, to providing a procedure for recycling items not accepted in standard recycling, such as Tyvek® envelopes, batteries, plastic bags, and computers. These guidelines aim to take the uncertainty out of what it means to be sustainable.

The PLUS Program is voluntary and its participants are self-monitoring. Taking part in the initiative can strengthen a firm's reputation and help to increase its efficiency, productivity, and employee recruitment and retention. Participation may also help to align a law firm with the growing number of current and potential clients embracing sustainable practices in a meaningful way.

Participating attorneys and firms are encouraged to advertise their participation in the PLUS Program. The Environmental and Energy Law Section is also considering recognition of the participants at the annual Environmental Law Forum.

For detailed information, check out the PLUS Program guidelines, and submit a pledge form if you're interested, on the PBA website (<http://bit.ly/aLeDti>).

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