

# **A Sustainable Environment: Our Obligation to Protect God's Gift**

by  
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## **More Creative Sustainability Strategies by University Students**

I have been teaching a course on sustainability strategies for many years, and in lieu of a typical final exam where the students are asked to answer questions, I take a different approach. I require each student to take a strategy learned in class and apply it to their place of work and tell me how it will improve their company environmentally, socially and economically. For students not working, they have the option to select an existing company that could use some help or they can create a new company. They are required to write a paper on their proposal but more important, they are required to make a presentation so the rest of the class can learn from their effort. Here is a small sample of ideas presented by students earlier this month.

When people opened jewelry stores, purchasing various stones was a crucial decision. According to the EPA, there are about a half million abandoned mines where the extraction of precious metals and gems has consumed most of the mine. Should these 188 million acres of abandoned land be left sitting there? A plan has been suggested to turn the AML (abandoned mining lands) into compost piles in order to restore the land's vegetation and effectively re-use the land. A process would be implemented to analyze the land and determine which sites will be the most suitable for composting. Since AML sites are often located in areas that are ill-suited for traditional commercial use, composting will take advantage of the attributes that can reduce the environmental impact while returning the lands to productive use. Since we convert about 30% of our food to waste, this is where it should be destined rather than landfills.

While the country is slowly adopting electric vehicles, more emphasis should be placed on electric trucks and buses. Long haul truck drivers have to take advantage of rest stops along the way, and this would be an ideal location for charging stations for the trucks. However, what if the trucks had solar panels on the roof which would provide for the generation of energy while the truck is travelling. Since most of the travel time is during the day and there is very little obstruction of the sun's rays along the highways, the trucks could realize a continuous generation of electricity to supplement the charged batteries. Solar panels could also be installed on the roof of buses.

How about applying the Base of the Pyramid strategy to college athletics. The largest marketing segment is the student population at the base of the pyramid. Offer something like "buddy passes" for friends and family of the students that provide tickets at reduced prices. The alumni of the college eventually become the center of the Pyramid, and they should also be allowed to obtain "buddy passes" for friends and family. At the top of the Pyramid are those that purchase courtside seats, suites, and corporate sponsors. While these may bring in the most profit per purchase, they are fewer and further between. The Base of the Pyramid strategy may have some real benefits at the college level.

A pair of students started a floral business and planned to network outside of the industry in order to transfer much of the flower waste to mulch and compost companies, agricultural plants, perfume and scent manufacturers, and even tea manufacturers. They added a water filtration system and water meters for more efficient use of water and added solar energy for the lighting in the green houses. They hope to add electric trucks for deliveries and collect waste cardboard and organic waste during the return of the otherwise empty trucks.

A meal prep for dogs could be a company that cooks locally grown food for dogs in the Lincoln Park area of Chicago and neighborhoods within the 5-mile radius. The company would create an image to gear towards environmentally friend dog owners and help them build social consciousness on what they can do for both dogs and the environment. Creating a product innovation where pet food made from locally grown vendors could start to become a norm in our society. The meal prepping company could be based on a monthly subscription that the customer has food plan options such as vegetarian, plant based, or chicken for their dog's plan. The food would be freshly made daily, and the customer can pick delivery service to be daily or weekly. The delivery service would consist of people using bikes to deliver. Volunteers for delivering the dog food would be extended special offers for their dogs.

Since major oil companies have gasoline service stations across the nation, they should start adding electric charging stations to their existing locations. As the demand for electricity increases, the demand for gasoline will decrease. So they should start to remove gasoline pumps and replace them with electric charging stations. On the roofs of these facilities should be solar panels to help offset the cost of the electricity from the grid.

Different business sectors have less options to become truly sustainable such as the financial services sector which consists primarily of offices. While they can make the offices more energy and paper efficient, there are other opportunities. For instance, insurance companies should add a Chief Sustainability Officer who would be responsible for minimizing the financial risks of the company. Being aware of the potential consequences of climate change, water shortages or even depleting natural resources would have a large impact on understanding future financial risks.

A number of sustainability strategies are being applied to a children's party house in Mexico. Apply the sharing economy to the minimally used appliances like refrigerators, gas grills, microwave oven and large cooler. Make sure that the waste bins are clearly marked for the different waste items. They are also planning to add solar photovoltaic technology for lighting and solar thermal for water heating.

I always look forward to hearing what my students are planning as they are the future and the disciples that are helping make this world a better place for all living things.