

# Work Style

A stylized illustration of a woman with curly hair, wearing a striped tank top and shorts, riding a bicycle. She is holding a red and silver tool that emits a trail of dark, swirling smoke. The background is a warm, yellowish-orange sky with stylized clouds. The overall style is reminiscent of mid-century modern graphic design.

A worldwide observatory on work style changes

#08

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## Kyoto Bluff







By THOMAS JOSEPH DOHERTY

## Activists: The Resource of Business

Environmental activists can be viewed from a variety of different perspectives. Savvy companies can open a dialogue with activists and advocates, and take advantage of their broad range of experience in order to help boost and hone companies' environmental platform and sustainability practices.

There's a lot of diversity in activism, and especially in what is broadly known as environmentalism. Business leaders need to realize that there are different languages of environmentalism. I am distinguishing activism from advocacy here. Advocacy is working for positive change within the system as it is. Activism seeks change by questioning systems, and possibly dismantling and recreating them.

There are certain qualities that people have that predispose them toward environmental action. We can think of it as a pathway. At the beginning, certain people are more or less altruistic or pro-social than others. If you tend to be more altruistic and to think about the rights of others, you're also more likely to be concerned about other species, natural places or threats to global environmental health, like human-influenced (and thus human-controllable) climate change. Those who develop an ecological worldview, rather than one in which humans are exempt from the laws of nature, move further along the line towards action. Another key step is whether someone senses a threat, either to themselves, or to other people, places or species. A sense of adverse consequences moves someone further along the line. People need to have a sense of responsibility, an obligation to do something, to step up and take action. And further, they need to possess

self-efficacy, a belief that they have the ability to do a sense of personal empowerment and possibility, otherwise if they feel powerless and apathetic they'll stop halfway through.

Some may become the traditional "activists" those working for deep radical change. You can also have people that undertake non-activist behaviors, such as signing petitions, and giving their support for different agendas. Others undertake private behaviors in their homes or with their families. Then you have organizational behaviors, the things that people do in their jobs.

Activists must be understood and seen as a resource by businesses and organizations rather than a threat. Forward-thinking companies should seek out activists and place them in situations where innovation is needed, where thinking "outside of the box" and getting to the roots of business processes is key. Don't squander your activists' energy on the "Green Team." Unleash them on key business problems.

Businesses need to be big enough to contain the energy of activists. As Rosabeth Moss Kanter says in a recent Harvard Business Review article, the best companies operate on the principle that they are not merely vehicles for making money, but also enduring instruments for accomplishing societal purposes. Articulating a broader purpose can guide strategies and actions, open new

sources for innovation, express corporate and personal values in their everyday work. These companies' claims that they serve society become credible when leaders allocate time, talent, and resources to national or community projects without seeking immediate returns. What's more, attention placed on social needs often generates ideas that lead to innovations. ●

### Here are some informal categories of activists:

- **Grassroots activists** work on mobilizing the base and rallying the support of citizens.
- **Policy activists** get to the conceptual nuts and bolts of environmental issues, and research what works.
- **Tech activists** are interested in things like designing a better solar panel.
- **Holistic activists** operate from their consciousness of their inter-being with Nature (green spirituality).
- **Survivalist activists** acknowledge limits and peaks.
- **Militaristic survivalists** may adopt a bunker mentality regarding resources.
- **Utopian survivalists** look to create beautifully small and self-sufficient communities and businesses.

fundamentally different from people in Africa or from animals, then that tends to breed apathy for that species or those people. One of the strong themes in psychology literature is about the importance of overcoming in-group and out-group thinking to the extent that people start to see and think and feel in terms of larger categories – we're all humans, or we're all part of the living community, we're all part of the biosphere.

Then the overarching perspective makes it far easier to identify with

the suffering of other people and other beings. People have done a retrospective analysis of individuals in WW2, for example who rescued or became part of a resistance movement trying to rescue the Jewish people versus people who passively sat by and let things happen. And one of the biggest differences was, people with more universalistic ways of thinking – rather than seeing in WW2 as seeing the Jews as fundamentally different people, they would have a value system and a belief system that emphasized our common humanity.