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## Summit: Business as usual must change *Mt. Hood college's sustainability event focuses on bottom line of responsibility*

BY CHAD ABRAHAM   
*The Gresham Outlook, Jun 29, 2007*

**Gary Langenwalter has made it his business to overcome knee-jerk reactions.**

As the co-founder of ConfluencePoint, a sustainable business consulting firm in Portland, he is often faced with skeptical clients worried about their company's bottom line.

"Most businessmen, when they hear the word green, say, 'We can't afford it,'" Langenwalter said. "What I tell them is if you do it, you'll make more money, retain employees, keep morale up. If you want to stay in business, this is how to do it."

He led a panel of business sustainability experts during a forum Friday, June 29, at Mt. Hood Community College. About 30 people in attendance heard a clear message: Business as usual must change, and it must change immediately.



Gary Langenwalter

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Panelists tried to dispel the myth that environmentally friendly practices hurt profits. But Angie Marzano said she's aware that revenue can be a touchy subject.

Marzano coordinates the city of Gresham's GREAT Businesses Program, which has consulted with more than 450 firms on implementing sensible ways to reduce pollution.

She saw evidence at one business, for instance, that antifreeze was being poured into a storm drain that emptied into a local stream.

But instead of taking a regulatory tone, an advisory approach works better, she said.

Dennis Wilde of Gerding Edlen Development, a real estate firm, said his company's profits have skyrocketed past the billion-dollar mark using energy-efficient building practices.

Making a lasting contribution to a community should be a business goal, he said, and it's not a far leap to realize that the best way of doing that is to leave the world a better place for future generations.

"We've gotta reduce that carbon footprint," said Wilde, whose company built the new Oregon Health & Science University medical office building. It is the largest structure in the nation to be certified by the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design program.

Gerding Edlen has a five-year goal of designing each new structure in ways to make them produce more energy than they use.

The forum covered a range of sustainability practices, from energy efficient light-bulbs and water-saving faucets, toilets and dishwashers to how a building site design can cut down on air conditioning.

"The savings are so huge that people are just not believing it," said Lyn Schmidt of Energy Trust of Oregon.

Sustainability practices can provide a big boost to employee morale as well, said Jim Newcomer, who co-founded ConfluencePoint with Langenwaller. He discussed a work-place experiment at a New Jersey phone company in the 1920s.

Employees were asked how they could improve their work environment. Lighting was improved, as was air flow, and productivity increased. Interestingly, it wasn't the improvements that helped as much as the employees' involvement in the decision-making process, Newcomer said.

Companies using sustainable practices will notice that "employees start to feel good about their work," he said.

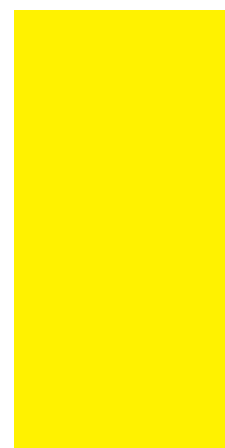
Newcomer described the adoption of sustainability as "the first steps in a major restructuring of our society."

"Any smart business is going to be there ahead of time, instead of lagging behind," he said.

Reliance on finite supplies of fossil fuels is ebbing as the sustainable message spreads, but Mt. Hood Community College's Javid Mohtasham said it will take a true crisis for many to get the message.

"As long as people don't feel the pain (of energy shortages), they won't get it," said Mohtasham, who directs the college's Environmental Health and Safety Program. "We have to feel the pain to understand."

For Langenwaller, it all comes down to a person's conscience. A company



using sustainability practices shows it cares about something other than simply profit. Employees realize the company is trying to improve the world.

“Instead of taking a nickel an hour more somewhere else, they’ll stick with companies that care about their children,” he said. “For the first time a corporate executive can make a decision and be a good human being and sleep well at night. That’s the power of it.”

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