

New Belgium Brewery: Employee Engagement Accelerates Sustainability

Can employee ownership and engagement facilitate other forms of corporate sustainability? At New Belgium Brewing, the Fort Collins, Colorado-based maker of famed Fat Tire beer, the answer is an emphatic “yes.”

The 19-year-old firm can demonstrate a clear link between its sustainability measures and its employee engagement strategies – the company has even developed a road show headed up by their full-time Sustainability Specialist staff that lets others know about their work and its bottom line benefits.

At New Belgium, sustainability initiatives and employee engagement – shared ownership via an ESOP, profit sharing, and open book management among other strategies – inform and mutually reinforce one another. The clear lesson for companies trying to more actively and credibly promote environmental responsibility? Establish baseline employee engagement strategies and include employees across the firm in the effort. In fact, strong employee engagement structures will likely make any company initiative easier to execute and the benefits will come faster.

New Belgium Brewing Sustainability Specialist, Katie Wallace, credits the company’s engagement strategies and ownership culture for the implementation and success of many company-wide initiatives, especially the eco programs. CEO Kim Jordan likes to say that everyone from entry level to executive “participates in the business of doing business.”

Because the company is employee owned and works to strengthen an ownership mentality (the very active ESOP committee is nicknamed POSSE), employees are encouraged to propose ideas that can help drive the business. These ideas return bottom line savings to the company and generate environmental benefits as well. For example, two employees recently proposed eliminating 12-bottle pack dividers, which led to \$280,000 and 150 tons of paper saved along with reduced machine downtime. Because of the brewery’s profit sharing program, all employees enjoyed a part of the cash benefit from the savings.

The company has also been bold about contacting its suppliers and asking them to consider cutting waste from certain products. The message is usually well received, according to Wallace.

New Belgium has formalized the steps to growing and developing its sustainability initiatives. Though coworker participation remains voluntary, employees are encouraged

to take part. Education via department-by-department discussion over the company intranet; soliciting participation by sending new ideas to cross department teams for input; and keeping solutions top of mind through constant communication forms the backbone of their approach.

KEY TAKEAWAYS:

Companies with engaged employees have an advantage when it comes to money-saving environmental sustainability efforts.

