

Fifth Annual Leadership and Social Change Net Impact Conference and Career Fair

Opening address by Dagmar Timmer

IISD consultant Dagmar Timmer delivered the following address on March 23, 2007, in Montreal to an audience of MBA students from three schools at McGill University. The students are interested in developing their careers in social responsibility and sustainability issues.

Introduction

When I heard about this event, I was excited to get the chance to meet you. The idea behind this conference—using the power of business to improve the world—is such a great one. MBA students and grads interested in social change: the world really needs people like you. Just last week, I heard this great quote from Paul Hawken, author of *The Ecology of Commerce*:

“There’s a big sign somewhere hanging from the heavens saying, ‘You are brilliant, the earth is hiring.’ You are desperately needed... Please dream, imagine and lead. Think fearlessly. You are the people you’ve been waiting for.”¹

Wow! That’s powerful. So let’s take that idea forward in the next 20 minutes.

To open this conference, I thought we’d meet some of the people that I find inspiring. Friends of mine actually, who are all doing things in their lives that are moving us towards a new economy. They’ve all linked economic, environmental and social concerns in innovative and exciting ways. From activist to big corporation, small business to developing country work, it really is a wide open field right now. You can

put your skills to work in lots of different places, across more sectors than you may have thought possible and based around the world—all while making a difference to people and the planet.

And your skill set from an MBA is very important to the sustainability field. That’s a fact. We’ll discuss a study I’m finishing with the

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International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD) about what it takes to be a sustainability leader—and what all of this means for business. Then, I’ll tell you about a few programs that I know of that can help put you on the right path.

Six People

Let’s go on a journey around the world to “meet” six people—mostly Canadians—who started working and

¹ Paul Hawken’s keynote address at RMIT’s Graduation in Melbourne, Australia, at Telstra Dome (December 20, 2002)

making a difference to business in their 20s. We're going to start at the grassroots—and take a look at business from that angle...



Fiona Koza

First, let me tell you about my friend **Fiona Koza** (33), who is Amnesty International's Business and Human Rights campaigner for Canada. Before that, she worked for Greenpeace in Australia, the Philippines and India. She has done a lot of corporate campaigning, influencing companies to improve their environmental and human rights practices. Sometimes Fiona meets with corporate executives in their board rooms, discussing aspects of their business that need improvement. But when companies fail to budge, she steps up the pressure. When necessary, she uses shareholder activism. She also uses the media to draw public attention to laggard companies. Fiona considers that one of her greatest successes was helping influence Coca-Cola to change its global refrigeration policy and phase out hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs). For that action, she dressed like a huge can of Coke and actually rolled out of a gigantic vending machine in front of the television cameras. How cool is that?

What I learned from Fiona—besides the obvious that she makes a great can of Coke—is that it can be fantastic to seek out a non-profit experience early in your career. These jobs tend to have a broad skill set they draw on and the responsibilities can be very high at a young age. Also, MBA grads bring skills that are in high demand in the not-for-profit sector. It's also important to use this time in your life (in particular!) to take a risk. Working at the cutting edge can also be

great for keeping your passion and commitment high. That passion is what you can take forward throughout your career into whatever sector you work in, whatever the work that you do.

The next friend also works at the grassroots...but in quite a different way, affecting small farmers. I met this guy when I was at Queen's (University) and then we had the chance to spend time together in Kenya when I lived there. Now he's in Toronto.

Farouk Jiwa (32) is also very inspiring to me. I want to share what he did first, then what he's doing now. He's a Kenyan and is co-founder and former Director of Honey Care Africa, a private sector social enterprise for community-based beekeeping across eastern Africa. It started in Kenya and now they have 50 staff. What's more impressive is that through their work, more than 9,000 rural households earn additional income of US\$180–250 per year. This may not sound like a lot but it's a dramatic increase in their lifestyle, meaning schools for their children and access to health care. It's really helped empower many people. Honey Care has been very successful and has won big prizes and recognition from the United Nations and different foundations. As well, the World Bank gave them money to support their work with farmers. Farouk shows us that you can transform communities through business in the developing world... and that brings us to what he's doing now. Today, he's the Director of CARE Enterprise Partners doing something akin to venture capital investment. He is working with entrepreneurs in developing countries to find market-based approaches for long-term poverty



Farouk Jiwa

reduction and to unleash entrepreneurship. He's a social entrepreneur, using business and innovative revenue models for social aims. They invest money in developing country enterprises and provide advice so that they can learn from examples like Honey Care.

One thing about Farouk's story—it reminds us to look at award winners! This is a great—and large—pool of people to get inspired by! They've been carefully selected. And there are more prizes every year that honour people who combine environmental, social and economic issues, such as the Alcan Awards and the UNDP Equator Initiative awards.

Now on to one of the biggest agents for change in the business world—the investment sector. Before going to Kenya, I lived in Switzerland. There, I hung out with **Jacob Malthouse** (29). He's now working on Internet issues with the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) in Los Angeles. When I first met him he was in his mid-20s, working with a team on an unlikely mission: link global capital markets and sustainable development. Though working at the United Nations, the team's mantra became “dress like bankers, talk like bankers, know banking, know their clients.”

First they brought together 21 asset management and brokerage companies to publish and review analyst reports on the financial impact of environmental issues. The crown jewel was an analysis of the share price impacts of environmental issues on the oil and gas industry by Goldman Sachs. The results were launched in New York but lost in the shuffle of a much larger event. Luckily the Head of UNEP saw value and offered another press conference in London with one caveat: there needed to be something new to announce.

The team seized the opportunity to launch an initiative targeting the top of the financial food chain: the world's largest institutional investors. After the launch, then UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan agreed to lend his weight to the initiative. In June 2005, Jacob's team started working on a set of Principles for Responsible Investment (PRI) with a group of pension funds, endowments and other institutional investors valued at US\$1 trillion in assets. The principles were built on past lessons from public-private partnerships. PRI has since grown to encompass more than US\$5 trillion in assets.

You might not hear about these principles in the news directly, but you can bet it is making some changes



Jacob Malthouse

backstage. And it is one of the reasons we are seeing huge changes in the investment sector. Now, this is an area that you will want to make smart choices in yourself—something that is both important and much, much easier to do in this day and age.

As a student it may seem a bit like a dream to have investments but, believe me, you will at some point soon. And making good choices about where you put your money and your retirement savings does have an impact on the world. Forget what your parents told

you about ethical funds losing

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money. They've changed and investing in them sends a strong message to companies, including about the risks they carry related to social and environmental issues.

What I learned from Jacob is that when you find yourself in the right place at the right time to influence a critical leverage point, push the boundaries and be very good at ignoring all the nay-sayers who tell you why something won't work! The other thing is to work

somewhere where you have an imaginative boss. Their boss was really supportive of the risk they wanted to take. And they couldn't have done it without a manager that fought for the team's ideas all the way.

So let's go into another big player in the environment field—Shell. Changing our dependence on fossil fuel and moving forward with renewables is an urgent challenge—regardless of where you stand with peak oil, making big changes in oil and gas is going to be critical. You have only to look at the newspapers to see almost daily reports on climate change. Here's the story of two friends of mine, Andrea and Jason, who have done different types of work with Shell.



Andrea Athanas

Andrea Athanas (36) was seconded to Shell a few years ago. She spent two years there—on loan from the organization we both worked for, IUCN – The World Conservation Union. They were interested in what she could bring—this scientific and business knowledge and networks she had and how it could help them think strategically about environmental issues. She helped develop Shell's framework on biodiversity. The framework still guides their work today. Hearing from her about that process showed me how important (and challenging) it can be to move big ideas like environmental stewardship from the headquarters into field operations for a trans-national company.

The second person is **Jason Switzer** (34). He's an engineer with a great business mind. He's worked at an environmental organization for six years and has been with Shell for over a year. He's got a tough

mandate—working on the environmental angle of the tar sands in Alberta. Phew. He and his team are making headway. Jason is part of a team responsible for tracking, reporting and offsetting greenhouse gas emissions in our oil sands projects. Activities include building and maintaining reporting systems, implementing renewable energy and greenhouse gas reduction activities domestically and internationally, and assisting in strategy formulation and stakeholder consultation. Another good lesson for those working in a company is that you can use your position to implement changes to its own operations. So, on the margins of his “real job” Jason is trying to find ways to make a difference within the organization, including asking awkward questions of senior managers. One such question during his new-hire orientation briefing helped bring a team together to launch organic TransFair certified coffee in Shell's wholly-owned Canadian gas stations.

One thing that's great about Jason's experience is that it shows that business is interested in people who have come from a non-profit background, they recognize that the skills to succeed, especially in corporate social responsibility (CSR), can be learned elsewhere, that they are transferable. And that's really important for when we talk a bit about the skills you need to succeed as sustainability professionals. You can move around from sector to sector—lots of people I know have done so. And it actually gives you a lot of strength to do so. You learn the different ways of working in business, government, non-profits. And they're all important players in sustainability.



Jason Switzer

So these are friends of mine working with some of the big names: Jason and Andrea with Shell; Fiona with Amnesty; Farouk with CARE International. A lot of you are probably thinking, yes, but I'm going into my parents' insurance company.... So here's another of my great inspirations, a friend from high school who is making a difference in his family-run business. He's in a company that helps meet our everyday needs, and there are lots of people looking at how these needs can be met sustainably. The Body Shop is a great example of that for cosmetics, so is the move towards organics and fair trade in food.

Richard Kouwenhoven (34) works in printing. His dad started a small printing company out of Vancouver 39 years ago. And after school, Richard joined him. It's called Hemlock Printing and it's based in Vancouver. Now here's an example of taking a family business, one which uses a lot of paper, and making it a leader in the field all across North America. They were concerned about where their paper came from, started mapping it, and were the first printer in the Pacific Northwest to get the stringent Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) Chain-of-Custody certification. Now it's working with a group called Markets Initiative to educate clients and other printers to do the same. Their environmental impact is the lowest it can be and their printing results are the best in the sector. They've won 125 local to international awards for printing excellence. And this is why they have been given a number of contracts thanks to their environmental leadership within the business community. So what was good for the planet was also good for business. And we're starting to see how business that is bad for the planet may not have a resource base to draw on in the long-term and is increasingly unpopular in the eyes of consumers.

The doors are wide open now! Many businesses and sectors are openly interested in transforming, and the way to do so is much clearer now than it was 10 years ago. There are many more examples in each sector for how to move forward in a way that is socially or environmentally sustainable. And that is inspiration for innovation! So yes, it's about being in the right place at the right time—like Jacob's experience shows—but it's also about turning whatever place you are in to the right place and looking for opportunities. Rick in the printing industry is a testament to that. It can be in small businesses or in large international corporations like Shell. Leadership is about taking risks and pushing the envelope—and sometimes using



Richard Kouwenhoven

good PR tricks to influence, like Fiona has done with Amnesty and Greenpeace. And about thinking like one earth—connecting business to poverty reduction like Farouk has done in eastern Africa and now around the world.

All of these people are transforming business. And all of them started doing so in their 20s and have a whole life ahead of them. I can't wait to see what they get up to next. And what **you** get up to. These aren't "magic" people—yes, they're smart and talented but they also took advantage of the opportunities that were out there and stuck their necks out for global change. You can all do that. So get inspiration from the people around you as well as award winners, look at case studies and interviews with experts. So many industries and products now have these kinds of personal stories: seek them out as you start exploring your own journey. **The Earth is Hiring.**

Skills for Sustainability Professionals

So, what *are* the **most important skills** for people who want to be leaders in sustainability issues? I just completed a study with the International Institute for Sustainable Development to find out. It was based on interviews and questions posed to the 300 past interns in this sustainability internship program that they've run for the past 10 years. Jacob—who did the investment work—and Jason—who is working with Shell—are both alums. So am I.

Do you have these: Project management skills? Stellar communication skills? Are you able to plan for the long-term? Do you have a passion for sustainability? Capacity for innovation? Can you work in teams? Can you translate complex ideas? Are you tenacious? Well, these came out on top as the skills sustainability leaders will need in the coming decades. And many of them are the same ones you have started learning through your MBA and through the early years of your career.

First, sustainability is a *communications challenge* across lots of different sectors and issues.

Communication skills came out on top as the most important skill set. Do you have it? You bet. Many of you have taken marketing and learned how to angle a product or idea for different audiences. Some of you may even have stellar communication skills! Engaging people will be the number one challenge—the ability to work across sectors, personality types and cultures for a better future.

Project management, including fundraising, emerged as a skill that young professionals wished they had had training in to be effective working on sustainability issues. Related was the ability to plan for the long-term. And you all have these skills—it's part of doing business, although we need to push for thinking beyond quarterly and annual profits.

The other key finding is that a *commitment to linking your lifestyle with your values* is important to sustainability leaders. So as we talked about earlier—it's about linking your values to your investment patterns, your food choices, what you buy.

To be a sustainability leader, people need the *capacity for innovation*. Well, you wouldn't survive a day in business without it. But let's take that to the sustainability field where it is critical. For us to take on the sustainability challenge, we need to take risks, push the boundaries! You're young. So make sure that you innovate even within business. So use your business skills and knowledge of economics and markets that you picked up during MBA, but *not* without questioning the underlying model.

One thing that also came out loud and clear through the research is that including business—or a business perspective—is now mainstream to the sustainability profession, especially the idea of corporate social responsibility. Also, sustainability professionals often take the opportunity to work across sectors, whether

by building bridges or switching between sectors like business, government and not-for-profit.

Where do we need to move in terms of corporate social responsibility? Well, first it was about responding to pressure from people like Fiona at Amnesty who questioned their social and environmental practices. Next, core practices started changing: where the resources came from to make products, how companies are run, what impact the waste stream has on the environment. This is still ongoing. Now though, there's a new dimension that a lot of forward-thinking companies are tackling: how to rethink their business from the bottom up! Companies are looking at how to make a product that is sustainable at its core, not just with a sustainability layer added on. The main challenge here is a design challenge. Society needs to start thinking in terms of the service we are seeking rather than the product itself. How do we start to cut out the resources that are needed to create services? This requires creativity and innovation from all of us. If you haven't yet, take a read through *The Ecology of Commerce* by Paul Hawken. It will give you a lot to think about.

Where to From Here?

Now, most of you are young professionals. So, how do you get started along this path? Let's talk about three organizations that are developing the skills of sustainability leaders like you and me. There are many more out there.

First, the **International Institute for Sustainable Development's** young professionals programming. I was an IISD intern in 1998. For the past 10 years, IISD has sent about 30 young people overseas each year to work with NGOs, intergovernmental organizations and research institutes. This year, it's going through a transition with just nine placements but keep checking out its Web site because it plans to come out in full force in the coming years again. Or do it yourself because a big lesson from the internship is the chance to spend some time out of your own context—going overseas, to a developing country even, is possible and inspiring. Take the chance to get an early experience that really shows leadership on sustainability issues. And then you will find that your career continues to take you in exciting and unforeseen directions. Jason, Jacob, Fiona, Farouk—they are all building on early successes, early risks that they took that paid off. And they couldn't have predicted their career when they

graduated from university. Besides its young professionals program, IISD's Web site also has resources about businesses and sustainability (<http://www.iisd.org>).

The **World Business Council for Sustainable Development** has a Young Managers Team that you can learn from, as well as lots of other resources for business professionals on their Web site. Your MBA experience can be complemented by specialist degrees in CSR or aspects of CSR like environmental management: again, take a look at WBCSD's Web site for some ideas (<http://www.wbcsd.org>).

Business solutions are necessary within development work. So... you can work with Farouk and others through CARE's **MBA program** with their growing portfolio of enterprises. Applications are in February each year and they pick about 20 people. Web site: <http://www.care.ca/cep> or E-mail: cepassociates@care.ca

Lastly, there's a great resource that I've become addicted to: **Worldchanging.com**! The encyclopedia they've written is the new "bible" of ideas about sustainability. Get your hands on it—you'll get excited. They have written up everything from how we can use microchips to track products' social and environmental impacts to the latest in solar technology. The book got to number 12 on Amazon. Again, this comes from a group of young people. They're based in Seattle and have linked arms with Al Gore and others. Their Web site? <http://www.worldchanging.com>

So let's all look around us and find these examples of people making a difference. Use them to stay passionate and take risks! It is both possible and exciting to link your business skills with a social and environmental mindset. It's also an urgent necessity for this generation. Good luck in your career! Have a great rest of the day.

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