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Grade: 40/30 Beautifully done. Guess you overcame the getting started problem!

Why Waiting Won't Work: An Apology for Sustainability

As final exams roll around, there is no shortage of stressed college students staring at computer screens. There is a rather high chance, especially if they are writing a paper, that they are looking at a blinking cursor, waiting for inspiration to strike. Admittedly, I do so quite often when I should be writing a paper but do not know where to start.

Commented [SD1]: That would be me!

Commented [SD2]: Absolutely the hardest part.

I waited and waited, searching for inspiration to put sustainability into words. It never came. My blinking cursor nagged me, begging me to take action. Sometimes, deadlines arrive before inspiration does. I believe that many governments stared at more than a blinking cursor, waiting to act for sustainability. They saw piles of information indicating that sustainability was something about which they should care. They saw that their constituents cared about this issue. Like a procrastinating college student, they did not need inspiration, they needed coercion. They needed, in essence, a deadline.

Now, to be fair, sustainability has been dancing around the international stage for decades. It has been a word embraced by experts for some time now. It has been presented as an achievable ideal at multiple United Nations conferences and in a multitude of documents. However, this theorizing has led to little tangible action by governments.

According to the United Nations, "The need for the integration of economic development, natural resources management and protection and social equity and inclusion was introduced for the first time by the 1987 Brundtland Report, and it has become central in framing the discussions at the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development...In 1993 the General Assembly established the Commission on Sustainable Development..." (United Nations). These are laudable events, but these do not represent enough actual change by the

world's nations. It is easy for a government to sign intangible agreements, but with no concrete expectations, the status quo has remained largely unchanged.

Commented [SD3]: Yes, it happens all the time.

Should governments care that developing countries have 98% of the seriously affected and 99% of all deaths from weather-related disasters? Will developed countries act when over 90% of the total economic losses are affecting the poorest nations (Global Citizen)? Will our government care that the U.S. is an ecological debtor? That we consume 207 percent of our ecological capacity? That over the past three decades, average temperatures in the continental U.S. rose five times more than for the century-long period since 1901? Will the U.S. government change its course when our heaviest rainfall events have become heavier and more frequent (Worldwatch Institute)?

Commented [SD4]: Doing some research is a big plus!

Needless to say, coercion has not quite arrived yet. It is clear that our environment needs to move toward sustainability. It is clear that our economy and our society need to as well. Governments around the world have taken faltering steps toward sustainability. While certainly positive and praiseworthy, they are not enough. It is also clear that citizens the world over recognize the importance of planning for the future. That is one way of boiling down sustainability; planning for the future.

Governments will sacrifice for sustainability for a myriad of reasons. It is viewed as a dream goal, an item toward the end of a long to-do list, an ideal for others to consider. It is often perceived as the celebration of the environment at the expense of capitalism. If familiar with everything this word entails, one realizes how untrue this perception is. Sustainability is not a term for the dismantling of industrial systems, it does not advocate for a return to primitive lifestyles, and it is not a demand to divest from modern society.

Commented [SD5]: This is called discounting the future...it will be fixed in the future.

Sustainability is a game changer. Is there anything this world needs more? When the United Nations asked world leaders to think about the future we want, they came up with questions to consider. “How can we help people move out of poverty and get good jobs, while protecting the environment? How can we provide access to clean energy for everyone, and make sure that the energy we produce doesn’t contribute to climate change? How can we make sure that everyone can get the water, food and nutrition they need? How can we shape our cities so that everyone can enjoy a decent quality of life? How can we build better transportation systems that allow us all to get where we want to go, without causing too much congestion and pollution? How can we make sure that our oceans are healthy and that marine life is not threatened by pollution and climate change? How can we make sure that our communities are resilient in the face of natural disasters? (United Nations)” How can any government deny that these matter? How could any constituent?

Commented [SD6]: Tough questions to answer.

As these questions intimate, sustainability is neither a nebulous, esoteric theory nor an unrealistic, utopian dream. It is planning for the future and it can be a game changer. Sustainability is living life with future generations in mind. As the United Nations’ questions show, it aims at economic success for all, environmental health, and equity. Most every person can support these ideals.

Commented [SD7]: It is most certainly a game changer.

As average Americans, we must repossess the power inherent to us in our government and society. We must remember that the voices of citizens can be heard in Congress. We must remind our elected officials that we control their employment. We must recognize the power of our money, voting not only at the polls but wherever and whenever we make purchases. We can refuse to give our money to faceless corporations and shady businesses. We can return our society to more equitable levels of income distribution. We can redirect our government’s funds

into programs that more adequately serve the common good. We can rejoice in the progress that has been made as of yet. We can relay these victories into further improvements.

The situation looming ahead of us is difficult to deal with, but we need not lose faith. The United States has been known for groundbreaking innovation. A renaissance of the American Dream is needed. Speaking personally, I do not dream of a nuclear family in carbon-copied suburbs. I do not need to own a home, manicure a lawn, or commute miles to work. I dream differently than my parents and grandparents did. I hope for an environmentally-conscious living space. I long for increased green areas and a vibrant vegetable garden. I want communities wherein people work, live, and shop within walking distance. As a nation, the realization that our collective dream will not reach a sustainable fruition is a hard pill to swallow. However, this is occurring. All indicators point to a need to change course.

Our society has always been an adaptable one and citizens have long been willing to initiate progress when the government drags its feet. Movements to end wars, protect lands, give women the right to vote, end slavery...these all started with normal people who had reached the limit of what they were willing to allow. I will acquiesce that it is hard to see the limits when grocery shelves are stocked, politicians do not seem concerned, water still pours from the faucets, gasoline still flows out of the pumps, and the demands of daily life are pressing. Read what experts expect, however, and causes for concern abound.

Sustainability does not only need to be instituted in the highest levels of society. Locally and even personally, it can be embraced. Shop at thrift stores and locally-owned businesses. Try farmers markets and growing your own food. Buy food consciously, aiming to reduce the waste you contribute. Upgrade your electronics less often. Carpool, try out public transport, invest in a

Commented [SD8]: Break free from this cultural norm...it is our best hope.

Commented [SD9]: Perfect!

bike, and break in those walking shoes. Hang your clothes to dry. Take shorter showers. These little steps and dozens more are impactful.

The situation before is daunting to be sure. Never has it been clearer that climate change is upon us and that adjustments will become necessary. There are more mouths to feed, greater demands on space and water, burgeoning landfills, and more issues ad infinitum et nauseam. We can be look at the numbers and give up hope or we can opt for a realistic and optimistic approach. There is nothing stopping us from taking steps to solve seemingly intractable and certainly disconcerting stumbling blocks on the road to a viable, thriving future.

One great barrier to sustainability is that individuals are convinced that their contributions to the cause are not meaningful. When millions are living one way, it can be disheartening to be among the few who are leading a different lifestyle. Every trail begins with the people who were brave enough to walk it first. The power of concerned and active individuals cannot be overemphasized. The potential you have to make a difference is limitless. You do not have to take me at my word, but please know I just want you and every human, our nation and every nation, to thrive. Educate yourself. Share what shocks you, saddens you, angers you, inspires you with the people you know. Find the changes that work for you. Challenge yourself. Take heart, make positive change, and assist others to do so. This nation and this planet are counting on you.

Commented [SD10]: You are already there, leading the way.

Commented [SD11]: Great stuff!

Works Cited

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