

Environmentalism – Perspective on Culture and Behavior

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Background

UPDATE Newsletter is making a major shift in content with this article. For several years we have discussed leadership issues confronting the business world. As we pointed out, year after year, leadership surveys continue to highlight those issues. Things are changing rapidly and issues confronting our very existence are becoming acute. As part of our consultancy, we worked with some key entities whose existence is directly tied to environmental challenges. Recognizing this increasing threat, we are shifting our focus as discussed below. We are passionate about protecting our environment and feel the need to voice our concerns and perspectives. We cannot continue to give our environment lip service when it is convenient and ignore it when it's not convenient. When we speak of environment, we focus our discussion and efforts on coastal waters and pollution affecting coastal communities.

Along with our consultancy addressing leadership development and improvement, over the past 15 years, Dean and his son formed and operated an environmental remediation non-profit, originally named Coastal Environmental Services (CES). They provided recreational boat pumpout services along the Connecticut coastline, offering an alternative to boaters who would normally just pump their waste tanks directly to the water when no one was looking. CES was a joint effort with the State of Connecticut DEEP, operating over 9 boats from Bridgeport to Mystic, Connecticut. During that tenure, we took the pumpout boat initiative from a rudimentary process of raising an orange flag to request a pumpout, to an integrated positioning and social media process for requesting and scheduling pumpouts. This evolution removed the barriers to people doing the right thing: they could request and schedule pumpout services at their convenience and not be enticed to dump their sanitary tanks overboard. On an average, in one boating season, we removed over 100,000 thousands of gallons of waste and disposed of it in appropriate processing facilities.

Through our consulting work with the Sea Research Foundation (Mystic Aquarium) and the Marine Sanctuary Foundation, Coastal Environmental realized a broader need for coastal environmental awareness and action. To that end, we re-structured Coastal Environmental into Coastal Environmental Research, Education, and Innovation Foundation retaining our 501 C3 status.

We envision:

A community where environmental stewardship, innovation and research contribute to a vibrant coastal economy.

With a mission:

To provide leadership to stimulate a culture of coastal environmental stewardship and action.

We feel there is a compelling need to make environmental response less reactive, while framing the dialogue into local issues with directly relatable outcomes, measurable and beneficial to the community. This would result in viable environmental stewardship and create models for other communities to build upon. Increased environmental awareness and ownership in improving and restoring the environment requires a community. Coastal Environmental sees the need to change behavior, promote environmental stewardship, all the while, making environmental initiatives more proactive and less reactive.

Introduction

One of the fundamental premises of Coastal Environmental is in order to realize environmental improvement there must be a shift in the culture from one of reactive responses to behavioral change.

Popular efforts to slow environmental degradation are typically reactive. Events such as annual beach cleanups and rescuing marine life from water borne garbage, abandoned fishing nets and lines are examples of sincere grassroots attempts to counter massive environmental impacts. As clean-up crews comb shorelines, some mostly recreational boaters are simultaneously discharging waste into local waters.



Lacking alternatives, countries around the world transship, bury, burn and scatter to the winds and waters all types of refuse, including pollutants and poisons. Cruise ships, airplanes and cars discharge massive amounts of CO2 into the atmosphere while transporting millions of eager tourists around the world to glimpse fading landscapes and unstable shorelines. Behaviors borne of ignorance and the absence of effective alternative approaches leave us with heroic but sadly limited one-off remedial efforts.

The looming issue is a lack of behavioral and cultural stewardship that confines concerned citizens to beach cleanups and similar initiatives. Environmental management and remediation strategies must reach into the hearts, minds and behaviors of people, enabling them to take action and hold those around them to task. The reactive efforts are good, needed and are helping, but they are still reactive.

In order to effectively positively impact environmental stewardship,

behavioral change is essential. So, what is the hold up? What are the barriers? Why can't our global leaders and global societies make substantive change or even progress? We think a big issue is the difficulty of delayed gratification and long-term outcomes. The connection between action and outcomes is so diffused and the scope so large that it becomes almost impossible to normalize the effort into some form of near-term gratification.

Recreational boaters are a good example of this tension between immediate gratification versus long-term benefits. Larger recreational boats have holding tanks for their sanitation facilities. To minimize discharging (emptying) those tanks into local waters, States and the Federal government fund and operate shore-based pumpout facilities and pumpout boats that go to a boat and pump-out their tanks, eliminating the polluting of local waters. Boat owners possessing a level of commitment to the marine environment utilize these facilities and services. For others, it's easier to open the 'Y' valve in the middle of the night and discharge overboard. They figure it's a big ocean and with tidal changes, "dilution is the answer to pollution." Really? That's not environmental stewardship. Its archaic thinking and a distorted culture, culminating in lazy and poor behavior.

Another coastal water pollution phenomena are harmful algal blooms (HABs). The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) explains that HABs emerge when algae grow at an exponential rate. They can produce toxins, and they are harmful to marine life, birds, and people. \$82 billion is lost each year in the seafood, restaurant, and tourism sectors due to HABs. HABs are thought to occur when there is an excessive amount of nutrients in the water, including phosphorus, nitrogen, and carbon. These nutrients come from runoff of lawn and agriculture fertilizer and from municipal sewage treatment plants. In our area of southeastern Connecticut and southwestern Rhode Island, a colleague and respected researcher reports that sewage treatment facilities are exceeding their discharge limits for harmful nitrogen and phosphorus with immunity, or nitrogen limits not specified. So while there appears to be significant attention focused on lawn fertilizers, large and concentrated amounts of pollutants contributing to the 'overfeeding' phenomenon is essentially hidden from the public discourse. The bottom line is that the behavior of people – boaters and municipalities are significantly contributing to the algae blooms. Behavior that must change.



Quality, Accurate and Timely Information

We believe a significant factor in changing behavior is quality, accurate and timely information. With our focus on coastal waters, a significant challenge is that water sampling and testing is sporadic. Saltwater creates more complexities. Bacteriological sampling requires cultures and time. Organics are different and are easier to sample and test. Along the coastline, at least here in Connecticut, sampling is a manual effort, typically conducted after a storm or some other event resulting in pollution. Nitrogen and phosphorous is rarely considered.

Coupled with the challenges of physically/manually collecting samples, timely reporting remains an issue. Because of these factors, it is difficult to identify the polluting culprits. Who is responsible for polluting?

Technology exists to mitigate these challenges through real-time sampling/monitoring, rapid communicating of results and geo-positioning, resulting in effective localization of sources, thereby identifying culprits. An additional benefit is mapping pollution plumes, hence distinguishing sources. For our coastal waters, the ability to monitor in real time with accurate and timely reporting demonstrates a level of commitment to environmental stewardship benefiting a community and its residents. The community's economic and quality of life is contingent upon a viable and healthy coastline.

Accountability

Polluting is easy. When no one is watching no one is worse off, and the monkey (my pollutants) is off my back. That Y valve in the yacht in the middle of the night, excessive nitrogen discharges because no one is checking, tossing or leaving garbage along the shoreline. All easily accomplished.

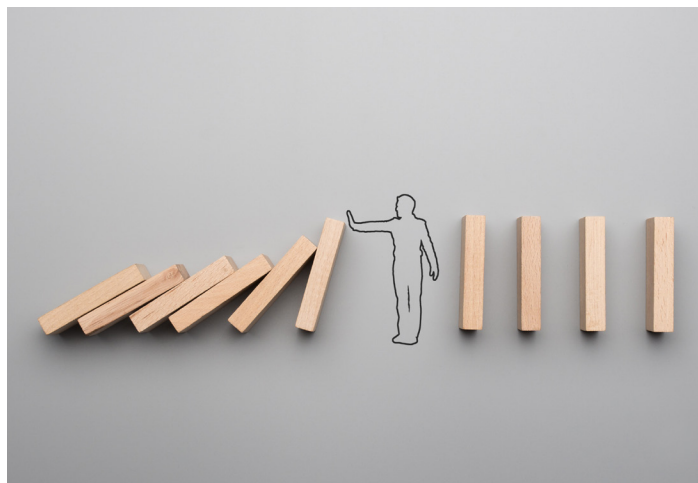
Our position is simple: demonstrate commitment to environmental stewardship through communication and public service information. Remove the barriers to doing the right thing, which promotes behavioral change. Through technological innovation and application ensure potential polluters clearly understand that conventional behaviors are no longer acceptable and have consequences.

Education

Education begets knowledge, awareness, hopefully behavioral change and beneficial action. Environmental educational efforts abound. Public Service Announcement, informational posters as well as other media messaging about the ominous factors affecting our environment and planet. Not that these efforts are for naught, but we believe there is a phenomenon coming into play and that is relevance. What's In it for Me (WIIFM)? Education and communication are essential and with that messaging there has to be relevance. Educational efforts must include very regional factors that community members can relate to. Broad PSA messaging raises awareness, while leaving recipients wondering what truly meaningful things they can do. For example, conservation, recycling and restricting use of plastic bags are feel good initiatives, but what happens to all this "stuff" once the recycling truck drives past one's house? We feel good that we are contributing to the

effort, but we also feel good when the "stuff" is gone. When we learn it goes to China, do we really care? Not our problem. Yet it is – we are on this ball of mud called Earth with everyone else. Many people do recycle and act responsibly, but too many simply give lip service or "poo poo" the need to think about the environment. These are the people that are the challenge. How do we reach these people? How do we get through to them that they need to realize that this is critical to the future? We need to convince them that they need to change their lazy habits and remove barriers for the sake of the future. We believe we need to reframe the issue into WIIFM for them to internalize the need and change.

The point here is to mitigate the sources of the problem, bad behavior. Via targeted relevant education we believe meaningful environmental stewardship can become a reality.



Technology and Community Collaboration

Making it all happen is yet another challenge. We believe effective action at a local level is crucial. Creating environmental stewardship can only happen at a local level. WIIFM can only be relative at local levels. In addition, at a local level, model communities can be created, demonstrating viability, creating best practices possessing viable measures that can be used to create frameworks for other communities.

To accomplish this there must be a marriage between technology, community collaboration and leadership. Technology in the context of effective communication as well as real-time measures. We started this article talking about HABs and recreational vessels dumping rather than pumping. We are currently working with collaborative partners to create and implement a real-time nitrogen monitoring system, we have on our design boards monitoring buoys to check for bacteriological concentrations to pinpoint violators. These systems are designed to communicate the breath of the problem, demonstrate a level of commitment to environmental stewardship, and ultimately change behavior. In summary, community collaboration along with technological monitoring and communication, we believe, can be powerful ways to prove local residents a WIIFM argument in the contexts of clean beaches, preservation of real estate values within the community and along the coastline, provide for a viable and balanced commercial, municipal and recreational community all

the while benefiting our coastal environment.

Conclusion

Pumping rather than dumping, recycling, paper rather than plastic all take effort – but in most cases it's reactive, but it is activity. Changing behavior is tough, and typically done by touching people in their pocketbooks. Refunds on bottles, token cost for plastic bags, town charges for trash removal in acceptable bags, etc. But does any of this change the hearts and minds of the people in a community. Where's the WIIFM case? If true behavioral change with a definitive WIIFM case were easy, it would have been done. It's not. The issue is time marches on and the effects of environmental degradation continue to show up more frequently with more gusto. It takes the will of people to say enough is enough. It requires a commitment by not just people but also governments at all levels and that commitment will cost money to provide the measurement, monitoring, policing and communication to raise the level of awareness and action to where it needs to be for our ball of mud to survive long term. Initiatives abound, and many are well intentioned, however, the communication and action

needs reframing into a distinct characterization of WIIFM. Big programs demonstrate a level of commitment on government and large corporations, but the associated initiatives are diffuse and difficult to directly relate to an individual in any sort of timely manner. Local leadership, private, non-profit, community, business etc. must join forces and make a commitment to change, not just rhetoric.

Protecting, preserving and even remediating our environment is a difficult hill to climb, but if we don't start making small inroads, taking baby steps at local levels, outcomes will elude us. Think about your habits regarding the environment. What can you change, and how can you contribute to the cause?



Acknowledgment:

Larry and I thank Kevin Logan, President, Macsea, Ltd for contributing his research and information regarding HABS (Harmful Algae Blooms). Dean and Kevin worked together 40 years ago as we started our consulting practices. One of the benefits of small consultancies is long term relationships and common values, which we share with Macsea, Ltd. I urge you to visit Macsea.com to learn more about Kevin's company. Please stay tuned because we intend to move forward collaboratively as we attack coastal environmental challenges. Thanks Kevin.



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