

The meaning of Sustainability...



This month's Sustainability Blog has been brought to you by our Sustainability Intern from Aquinas College, Stephanie Goorhouse... enjoy!

Hopefully over the past few months you have taken a glance or two at the monthly sustainability blog postings conveniently sent to your email! The topics have ranged from water bottle recycling facts to conservation and LEED buildings. However, what has not been specifically addressed is the *meaning* of Sustainability, which is the framework of all these blog postings. For this post I have asked a few individuals what Sustainability means to them. I got answers like "Well, it means being green and caring for the environment", "Buying eco-friendly products", "to be economical", "To be conscious of others", "conserve resources" and others but with the same general concept. Not one of these explanations is right. But, they are not necessarily wrong either...

I see the subject of Sustainability as an onion. There are many intricate layers, each with its own sweet bitterness. What those individuals said fall within those layers which encase the core meaning. The core meaning lies within a key concept of sustainability, that being the **Triple Top Line**, also known as **Triple Bottom Line**. The triple top institutes three *simultaneous* requirements in order to practice sustainability. The three are what is commonly known as **People, Planet, and Profit**.

An example of this can be seen on a green roof (a roof covered with grass and plants!). The green roof meets all three requirements simultaneously by:

- **Planet-** providing habitat, creating oxygen, purifying the air and reducing run-off.
- **People-** aesthetics for employees and the surrounding community, fresh air and industrial noise reduction.
- **Profit-** services are seen by the green roof aiding in heat retention (reduce natural gas use).

Scratching your head? Sustainability is a difficult concept to grasp due to all the various ideas/theories, but it is not difficult to understand the core meaning. The origin of the word sustainable is "to uphold." Well, if society would like to uphold our current industrial system a change needs to occur. We cannot operate on the barriers of fixed resources, disregarding natural laws. We can no longer be the species that continually takes vs. the detritus organisms who continually replenish (*Ishmael*, Daniel Quinn). A resolution is to operate our businesses and lives through the lens of sustainability. We are on the brink of a sustainable revolution with the future resting on our shoulders...