

Sustainable Self

SPEAKER 1: So to introduce our presenter tonight, we have Ben Woodman. He is from the state of Maine. He has always had a passion for the environment because he grew up hunting, fishing, hiking, and traveling. He is currently studying environmental science and hopes to work in sustainability and or education in the future. He is the chair of Environment Sustainability Alliance here at the WSU Pullman. So just to start us off and I'll hand it over to Ben.

BEN WOODMAN: Hey, guys. So this is Sustainable Self. Thanks for joining. Let's go ahead and jump right into it.

So as she was saying, I'm a undergraduate student. I'm studying environmental science. I'm a sophomore right now. And there's my contact information on the right. And I'll provide it to you at the end as well. If you have any questions that you didn't get a chance to ask, I'd be more than happy to answer those for you.

So just to give you a little background, the plans I have are two routes. I want to graduate with my Bachelor's in environment science, and possibly continue in school for my Master's in Education and work there. Or, again, graduate with my Bachelor's in environmental science, work in the field for a period of time, and then, get into education.

So let's go ahead and jump right in to it. The way that we're going to go through this webinar is we're just going to talk a little bit about sustainability, what it is, some different ways to think about it. And I'll give you some examples. And then, we'll talk about what's considered when you're thinking about becoming sustainable. And then, I'll give you that step-by-step process that you guys have access to on that Word document and go through it in a little bit more depth.

So let's go ahead. So what is sustainability? You can think of it as a system, or a cycle, that's continuous and renewable. So this example here is the natural water cycle. So there's condensation in the atmosphere and then it gets colder and it precipitates. And then it infiltrates the soil. And that creates run-off. And the water then evaporates back into the atmosphere, or it transpires off of leaves and other wildlife. And it continues through that process.

And the reason why that's sustainable is because it's always going-- there's no input needed other than water, which is already there. It's an abundant resource for this cycle specifically.

So if looking at that visually doesn't work for some people-- some people are visual learners. Some people need it in words and very direct.

So you can also think about it as how we live. Everything that you see, everything that you have can be linked back to an environmental resource. And so, sustainability is when humans and nature can coexist productively.

Now, you might think, well, nature is being productive and humans are being productive. But the sustainability aspect of it is when we can have that happening and be able to fulfill the needs that we have now and also for future generations. The way I like to think about it is one of the biggest resources that we use is fossil fuels. And that might sustain our needs right now, but maybe 100 or 200 years from now, those generations are going to struggle with using that resource. So it's not sustainable.

So how do we know what is sustainable and what is not? It's as simple as you just need to think about it and ask the right questions to yourself and others around you. So these are just some simple things to consider when you're trying to become sustainable.

What effect does it have on the environment? Whether it's what you're doing or how it got to you. So if you're looking at energy, you might be emitting fossil fuel emissions, but also, there were some fossil fuel emissions being put into the atmosphere before it got to you. So that's something to think about.

The costs, monetary and personal, I'll go over that on the next slide.

The benefits to what you're doing, whether it's monetary savings or just a simple make you feel good thing.

And then, another thing that I don't think many people think about is who is affected by what you're doing. So if you're trying to become sustainable, who is affected? Is it the people in your community? Is it the people in your household? And so on and things like that.

So just to give you an example, with those four things in mind, if you're looking at your energy usage, one thing that you can ask yourself is what natural source does it originate from? Is it fossil fuels? Is it originating from being drilled out of the ground? Or is it being produced by the sun or the wind and so on?

And then, going to the left there, how much money and time of yours is it going to take to

become sustainable? So a lot of times people aren't necessarily all for solar power or wind power because it costs a lot to install. And people don't think about how much they would save if they do that. And then, time as well, because it's not one of those things that happens instantly. It takes some time for the resource to be built, to get there, and for you to maintain it.

And then, going across there, what are the benefits from it? Obviously, there's benefits. Over time, if you have a solar panel, or a wind turbine in your yard, or something like that, over time, you'll see the monetary savings that you're making.

And then, who and how many does it effect? Is it going to affect your neighbors if you get a wind turbine in your yard? Are they going to be OK with that? Or are you going to have issues there? And your family, if you guys use a lot of energy, you might need more than one wind turbine. You might need to give up some yard space or simple stuff like that you got to think about.

And then, let's look at one more, food consumption. Where and what is it coming from? The example I like to use is McDonald's versus a garden. So where is it coming from? To be honest, you don't know. The cheeseburger that you get at McDonald's, it could be brought in from across the country frozen. They cook it and give it to you. Whereas, if you have a garden, you know exactly where it came from. You know exactly what went into producing it.

And what is it coming from? Did it come from an animal? Did it come from an animal that might have had a disease? Whatever the case may be-- and then, obviously, what did it come from if it came from your yard, if you had a garden?

So then, again, to the left here, what are the personal and external costs involved in the creation of your food? Well, a McDonald's cheeseburger for lunch every day might not exactly be the best choice for your health. That's a cost. And also, just monetary. Again, it's more expensive to do that than it is to go home and make a sandwich.

And then, jumping to the right, are there benefits to what you're eating? So if you're eating things that are unhealthy every day, later on down the road you might have some health issues. Whereas, if you plant your garden or buy more produce at the supermarket, there might be more benefits there.

And when you're trying to become sustainable, who is affecting? Obviously, if you go from eating cheeseburgers every day to produce and healthy things, then you might see an

increase in yourself as well as your family and things like that.

What you need to think about when you're trying to become sustainable-- for me, the way I think of it is there's really three simple things that you have got to have. You got to have the right mindset. If you aren't fully thinking about everything-- and what I mean by that is if you think that you can be sustainable in one thing and then maybe not in another, that's really not the mindset to have because it's not true sustainability.

And then, commitment, it takes a lot of time and a lot of work to do things like this. So once you start, you have to stay committed if you really want to be sustainable. And patience is probably the biggest and hardest thing with this subject because, like I said, it takes a lot of time. It takes a lot of work. And you might not see results immediately if you start taking actions necessary to be sustainable. So you got to stick with it and wait it out.

So we're going to go over the steps. I'm going to go into some depth on each step. You have on your worksheet examples and things you can do. But I'm going to go over some different stuff here in these slides, so you're not seeing and hearing the same thing.

So step one, where can I conserve? You just need to sit down and look at everything that you have and everything that you do and determine what it is that you want to change. Here are a few examples. Your water consumption, the amount of waste that you produce, your carbon footprint if you want to reduce that. There's tons of online carbon footprint calculators and just things that you can do as simple as taking the bus more often than driving a car.

And then your stuff, your luxury items-- let's say one t-shirt per month versus 11 or 12. People often go a little overboard with the luxury items because they think that they need them versus they want them.

And your food, we talked about that. And your energy usage, we talked about that.

And then, going back over here to the left, the community. It's a bit larger scale, but what I mean by that to make your community more sustainable you can do something as simple as looking into creating a community garden, so people can come and they have a portion of this garden where they can grow their own food and whatnot.

So step two, what and how much am I consuming? The only real way that you can figure that out is to collect data. And the two simplest ways, in my mind, are to analyze what you have. So you can look at your energy bills. You can look at your receipts. You can observe your meter

outside for your electricity and things like that.

And then, if you don't have access to those, or you don't want to take the time to look at those, you can observe what you're doing. So over the course of a month, keep track of how much waste you're producing, how much you travel, and much fuel you use to travel. Keep track of your electricity bills and things like that. And then, you'll have where you stand, so you can go ahead and change.

Step three, how can I change? You've got to sit down and you've got to make a plan. If you don't do this step, it's going to be a lot harder for you because you won't have a blueprint essentially of what you want to do. And it's a lot harder to stick to being sustainable and becoming sustainable unless you have your process set up for you.

And then, step four, it seems generic and weird to have this as a step, but you just got to do it. You got to apply your plan and move forward. And the reason why I've put this as a step is because I feel like a lot of people, whether it's sustainability or just their weekly routine, they might have a list of things that they have to do, or a plan for what they want to do, and they put all this work into doing it. And then, they say, OK, the hard work is over. And then, they forget about it. They don't do it.

So this is crucial. You got to get out there. You go to commit. You got to do it.

So let's go into some depth on these. Step one, determine what is that you want to change. And here are a few examples that I gave earlier, your water consumption, energy usage, carbon footprint, and your stuff, or your luxury items.

Step two, the two examples I want to use that aren't on your worksheet are food consumption and food waste and then your waste in general. So if you look at your food consumption and your food waste, you can keep track of how much you buy and keep track of what you buy. And you can do that by observing your receipts and then keep track of maybe how much of that you actually use and how much you waste.

And then, looking at your general waste, it's important to determine what kinds of waste you have. A lot of people just think of it as whatever is in the garbage can. And plastic, food, and electronics are a big part of what you waste.

And I put electronics in there, a lot of people don't think about that. But a lot of people throw

their old cellphones away in the trash versus recycling them. Or batteries, they'll throw those away instead of recycling them. And that has a huge impact. That's quite the opposite of being sustainable.

And then, keep track of how much of each of those you waste. And then, track the rate and volume of the waste. If you're doing it once a month-- let's say you're throwing a cellphone away maybe once every six months versus recycling it, that's something you got to think about.

So step three, develop a plan. With your food consumption and your food waste, maybe like I said before, determine how much you buy. Determine the amount of waste from what you eat and buy. In this plan, you have to figure out where what you're eating comes from because if you don't do that, than what is there to change? If you're trying to become sustainable and you're buying things from industrial-sized companies where they're using machines that produce fossil fuel emissions and things like that, then that's not sustainable.

And then, I put this on there, go out to eat less. Some people go out with their significant other two or three times a week. If you want to be more sustainable, maybe go out once a week and cook for him or her the other two days.

And if you have the time, money, and area, the space to do it, you can grow your own food. Make a garden. A lot of people think that it takes a lot of space to make garden, but there's also raised gardens where you have, essentially, a box that's taking up a small area of the ground. And you fill it with soil. And you plant your own small, little garden. I have three of them at my house where I live. And we produce a lot to be honest.

And also, you can raise your own meat. I have chickens at my house, so we get a lot of eggs. And then, we raise the chickens and harvest them and things like that. And it cuts down a lot in costs as far as buying that stuff at the grocery store.

And then, you have to do a little research, but you can buy more sustainable food products. Farmers markets are notorious for having sustainable food products, whether it's organic or not. You know where it's coming from. You can talk to the farmer or ask them what went into, things like that.

And then, if you're at the grocery store, you can go get organic food items. There's some controversy over whether organic is healthier or not. But that comes in the research that you

have to do as a person. If you want to be sustainable, you've got to look at what makes this product organic.

So then, let's take a look at your general waste. If you keep track of the volume that you produce, discover what you do and do not need in the future. Sit down with whoever's involved in these decisions. And talk about do we need this much of this product? Because we waste a lot of it. Cut back. That's the point, I guess.

You can buy renewable products. And what I mean by that is if you take a look at the-- how can I put this? For example, t-shirts, if you buy t-shirts for a child and as they grow up, you're not going to need those. Look at what went into making those t-shirt. Was it renewable products? Was it recycled bottles? Was it cotton? Those kinds of things are essentially what you need to do. You need to do research on everything that you buy if you want to be sustainable.

And then recycle everything possible. A lot of people don't recycle everything, not because they don't want to be sustainable or that they want to have a negative impact on the environment, but a lot of the time people just don't know what is and what is not recyclable. So again, that comes back to the research that you have to do on your part in order to achieve that.

So keep it clean. Avoid pollution. I like to use this example. It's silly, but it happens. If you're carrying your trash out to the garbage can and it rips open and trash goes everywhere, just clean it all up. If a candy wrapper blows away in the wind, and you say, well, screw it, that's gone. That's just lazy. And that's not sustainable.

And before I go on to step four-- we all know what it is, but before I go ahead and say it, make sure that everybody that's involved with your plan is on board. Because if you're in a house with a bunch people and you're trying to cut back on your energy usage, or you're trying to make changes, install new products and things like that, if a few people are not on board, it's going to be a lot harder for you to achieve that. So just sit down with everybody that's involved and make sure they're all on board.

So step four, apply your plan. Do it. There's not really a whole lot to say about that. Just do it.

And I just wanted to touch back on this. Keep in mind these four things. It's pretty crucial. When you're thinking about each-- each area that you're trying to conserve and be sustainable

in, keep in mind the environment. How is that affected? The costs, how much to you, everybody around you? The benefits, a lot of people look at the negative positive more than the positive, but if you want to feel good about it and about yourself, you should probable look at the benefits more than the costs.

And then, also, think about who is affected by everything that you do.

And then, before I finish up here, don't try to take everything on at once. A lot of people will look at this stuff and say, I want to change my energy. I want to change my food consumption. I want to change this, this, and this. And they get overwhelmed. And they can't keep up with everything that they put forward.

So just taking it on one step at a time, one area at a time. But at the same time, be persistent and consistent. Have your goals set out. And stick with it. Achieve those goals.

I think that is it. Thank you for attending. My contact information is there. If you have any questions, feel free to email me. And if you have any questions now, please feel free to ask them.

All right, thank you, Andrea.

SPEAKER 1: Well, thank you for coming and joining us tonight. You can check out connections.wsu.edu for more events. And if there's no more questions have a good night. Thank you for coming.