



IN THE LONG RUN

DAVID T BINKS

David T Binks talks you through the three essential things to consider when building a sustainable business

You're likely sick and tired of hearing about sustainability, a term that has been so overused it has almost been rendered meaningless. Thinking about sustainability generally conjures up images of green buildings with green walls and green roofs, or of words prefixed by 'eco'. However, this is the tip of the sustainable iceberg – what aspirational businesses need to be looking at is the 'triple bottom line' of People, Profit and Planet, also referred to as the 'Pillars of Sustainability'.

Under this framework, when you are measuring the social impact of your business on people, the following metrics are worth exploring: do you offer professional development opportunities for your staff; do you have a succession plan in place; does your company make charitable donations; do you provide a wellbeing program? Some of these initiatives will be easier to implement than others, but starting

to think about them will have a profound effect on your business.

When you are reviewing the economic dimension of your business – the profit – obvious measures are: maintaining or increasing revenue and growth, monitoring your client base to ensure financial stability, and, ultimately, operating a viable business, rather than just trying to turn a fast buck. A simple exercise is to analyse peaks and troughs in your annual sales and take note of how they affect your business, with a view to levelling out sales and avoiding excessive fluctuations.

“IN THE LANDSCAPING INDUSTRY WE ARE RUNNING BUSINESSES TO GENERATE REVENUE AND WE ARE ALSO ENHANCING THE ENVIRONMENT”

Perhaps one of the most obvious measures for our industry is the environmental impact of your operation on the planet. Look at the amount of energy consumed by your business in all of its facets (electricity, gas, diesel, petrol), and ask whether these can be reduced; examine whether you can lower the amount of waste generated by your works; ensure that pollutants are monitored and minimised. Take a look at your supply chain: can you buy locally produced materials for projects, rather than buying imported products with huge carbon footprints? Are there resources on-site that can be conserved and reused, rather sending to landfill?

The United Nations defines sustainability as 'meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet theirs'. We are in a privileged position in the landscaping industry, as, while we are running businesses to generate revenue, we are also enhancing the environment at the same time. When we carry out soft landscaping works, we are offsetting carbon and improving the green infrastructure for generations to come, alluding to the proverb 'society grows great when old men plant trees beneath whose shade they'll never sit'. We don't necessarily need to be old men or women, but hopefully you get the message.

The key to a sustainable business is paying attention to those things which motivate you and drive your business forward in a way that has a positive impact not only for yourself, but for those around you. If you install a few green roofs along the way, then all the better.

ABOUT DAVID T BINKS

David T Binks is managing director of Cheshire-based Landstruction, which was set up in 2010 and now has 30 employees. It has won Gold medals at RHS Chelsea and RHS Tatton Park. David also launched the Big Hedge Co., which supplies and installs mature hedging and topiary nationwide.

landstruction.com, bighedgeco.com

