

10 Questions

**about environmental training
you've always wondered about**

- but been too scared to ask!

Clare Feeney

Clarefeeney
The Sustainability Strategist

...enhancing your capability...

10 questions about environmental training you've always wondered about – but been too scared to ask!

This short e-book highlights some of the questions that are often asked about environment training – and if they're not, then they should be!

The answers will help you explore why environmental training is such a great idea, whether you work in a government environmental agency, a business, trade or professional association, a tertiary or adult vocational learning institution, a professional training or learning and development team, a First Nation or a non-profit.

You can find out more at www.clarefeeney.com.

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Welcome!

Thanks for your interest in environmental training – it’s a great way to change the world for the better.

And you’re right to have some serious questions about it.

Yes, environmental training has worked well for some issues in some jurisdictions – but how can you be sure it will work as well in yours?



Asking questions is good.

Environmental training is part of a long-term working relationship with some of your important community stakeholders, so it pays to consider it carefully before leaping in.

Congratulations on doing just that!

Use this bite-sized e-book as a taster. If you like it, there is plenty more support for you, from my book, “How to Change the World – a practical guide to successful environmental training programs”.

My book is accompanied by a free Action Planner workbook and over 30 free resources to help you get your environmental training to success – faster.

Stay on the list for my free e-newsletter, and you’ll receive small doses three or four times a year of valuable tips and trends, as well as news about my upcoming workshops, keynote presentations and more.

And even if you decide in the end that environmental training is not for you, or at least not right now, you will still have learned heaps of practical information that you can apply to your environmental management strategies, operations, monitoring and evaluation.

With all my very best wishes for your every success –



Clare Feeney
The Sustainability Strategist

About me

I'm based in New Zealand – and I know how lucky I am lucky to live and work in an outstanding and varied natural environment and a dynamic cultural environment.

South Pacific Paradise it may be – for some – but we do have our environmental issues, and I've worked in that field all my professional life.

That's what makes me The Sustainability Strategist.

I worked for three years in universities in Australia and New Zealand after gaining my Masters degree in physical (and a little bit of human) geography. After a year in research at the University of New South Wales, I lectured for two years in the Geography and Environmental Science Department of the University of Auckland. More recently I ran a Master's class in cleaner production, waste minimization and resource efficiency for business and a Master's level class in Water and Society in that department. I continue to give two 2-hour guest lectures every year to the Masters class in Urban Design at the University of Auckland School of Planning.

Twelve years experience in hands-on water and soil management for regional government and 20 years of consulting gave me in-depth experience with a wide range of environmental and sustainability issues that affect government and businesses.

My clients come from a range of sectors:

- manufacturing
- farming
- central, regional and local government
- universities
- first peoples and community groups
- water supply, stormwater and sewerage utilities (I haven't fallen in yet!)

At present I'm writing a series of books on business productivity and the environment while continuing my keynote speaking, environmental training and consulting.

I live for sustainability – helping to build a world where everyone has the chance to lead a life of choice and meaning.

This vision informed my [book](#), *“How to Change the World – a practical guide to successful environmental training programs”*, published in the UK in 2013. It sets up a way to create jobs, grow skills, increase profits and improve the environment, all at the same time. It comes with over 30 free resources that have come out of my unique expertise developed over many years.

My hands on operational experience informs my sustainability strategies, making them simple, practical, effective, measurable – and fun!

Contents

Ten questions.....	1
Question #1 What’s the difference between environmental education and environmental training?	2
Question #2 We’re a government agency – isn’t it quicker and easier to just prosecute firms instead of going to the trouble and expense of training their staff? .3	3
Question #3 Environmental training is just another cost to businesses. Why should I let my staff take time off to attend?.....	4
Question #4 How does environmental training fit with my business?	5
Question #5 What’s the point of training staff when all they do is up and leave?.....	6
Question #6 I run a retail store in a big shopping mall – surely environmental training is irrelevant to me?.....	7
Question #7 What’s the point of doing environmental training when it’s impossible to measure the results?.....	8
Question #8 Are you telling me my environmental experts aren’t good trainers?.....	9
Question #9 Our company is too small to do our own in-house training and we can’t afford to pay environmental experts to come in and do it for us. Where can we get the help we need?	10
Question #10 I send my staff on training – but then they come back and in a day or two, they’re back to their usual bad habits. How do I get their training to stick?	11
And here’s another question	12
How the seven elements of successful environmental training apply to government-sponsored programs.....	13
How the seven elements of successful environmental training programs apply to business initiatives.....	14
Who will you talk to now and what will you do about it?	15
Any more questions about environmental training?.....	15
References.....	15



Ten questions



What are some of the unasked questions you have about environmental training? How many questions have you asked that are still unanswered – or that have not been answered well enough?

You know what the good trainers say?

“The only really dumb question is the one you don’t ask!”

So here they are ... 10 of the dumb, difficult and downright fundamental questions about environmental training.

Got any more?

Note them below as they occur to you – and see the end of this ebook for what do to about them.



Question #1

What's the difference between environmental education and environmental training?

This is a good question. The words “training”, “learning”, “awareness” and “education” are often used interchangeably. Other terms like “professional development” or “learning and development” are also common.

I focus on environmental training and define it as:

“the acquisition of work-related knowledge, skills and practices that will improve a specified aspect of on-the-job environmental performance in measurable ways, ideally as set out in a clear statement of performance standards and/or outcomes.”

This means you need a technical guideline or a set of standard procedures so people know exactly what they are expected to do – including who, what, how, when, where and why.

So while it may include information that could be called environmental education or awareness, environmental training refers to adult vocational training that meets workplace needs, while also delivering outcomes for the environment, the community – and the business.

“

Training should be part of a risk management strategy for reducing the probability of ... property loss and environmental incidents. A single incident can result in costs thousand of times the combined cost of a good training program, proper equipment selection and safe work practices. *JobTraining.com*



Question #2

We're a government agency – isn't it quicker and easier to just prosecute firms instead of going to the trouble and expense of training their staff?

I've often wondered about this.

It would clearly be a breach of natural justice if an environmental agency lacked clear standards but used punitive enforcement in the event of breaches of the law – especially if there were no clear guidelines as to what measures would have enabled businesses to avoid such breaches. The result? Businesses would understandably lose confidence in environmental laws, agencies and processes.

By contrast, consider what might happen if enforcement were not used at all, but good guidelines and industry training were available? In that case, we'd probably see better environmental performance emerge – but it might take a very long time, with valuable environmental resources being damaged along the way and a lot of people affected by the resulting environmental externalities. The result? This would inevitably result in a loss of community confidence in the law.

Therefore, on balance, I think that having a good regulatory framework (ideally accompanied by a good guideline and industry training in how to use it) and the appropriate use of sanctions and incentives offers a faster track to environmental protection.

And my experience tells me that taking a partnership approach to this issue is highly cost-effective and produces a better overall result in a shorter time for both participating businesses and the environment.

Good training works.

“

If you think education is expensive, try ignorance. *John Harvey*



Question #3

Environmental training is just another cost to businesses. Why should I let my staff take time off to attend?

Do you want to attract and retain the best staff, increase staff engagement, productivity and profitability and reduce staff turnover and absenteeism?

Good staff training and development and good environmental management are proven ways of attracting and retaining the best staff.

One Australian company with just over 1,000 staff set up an excellent induction program for new staff. In just one year, turnover of new staff dropped by 50%.

Want the numbers? The net benefit for this firm was over \$4 million Australian dollars per year, meaning that:

- the ROI (return on investment) was a return of \$855 for every \$1 spent
- the benefit:cost ratio was 79:1
- the payback period was 4½ days.

And that's just ordinary training. But because environmental aspects are threaded throughout a company's whole operation, everyone is involved, and staff members really appreciate being asked for their views on what they can do to help the company make a difference for the environment. Result: engagement, motivation and financial benefits can yield an even higher ROI than many other training topics. How?

One New Zealand company had a series of environmental prosecutions, and reluctantly realized it had to clean up its environmental act, because its poor performance was losing it business. Despite its disgruntlement, the company did the job thoroughly and rolled out a comprehensive environmental training programme, from the boardroom right through to the work sites. Four years later, its environmental compliance was exemplary, staff engagement and productivity had increased, the company's badly tarnished reputation was greatly enhanced, interesting work was rolling in – and the company's turnover had tripled – all results that the CEO attributed to the environmental training program.

I'd say the staff time off for environmental training was worth the investment, wouldn't you?

“

A big inhibitor to putting a training program in place is the perception that it will take too much time. There is no investment you can make that will do more to improve productivity in your company. Saying your staff are too busy to train is like saying they are too hungry to eat.

Adapted from Ben Horowitz



Question #4

How does environmental training fit with my business?

Environmental training must be aligned with your business goals. This means your business's corporate goals and policies should specifically address your environmental aspects, impacts, risks and aspirations as an integral part of the business strategy and operations. If you're not sure what this would look like, search the Internet for the environment and sustainability provisions of the annual plans, reports and policies of companies like yours.

Make no mistake – action on environment and sustainability can save your firm money and increase its profits – and measurable business performance targets relating to what your environment and sustainability programs should achieve will help you do this faster.

Even something simple like driver training can reduce fuel and vehicle maintenance costs. Supply chain or quality management might offer the best benefit to you, or perhaps environmental risk reduction in operational, legal, financial or insurance terms.

Firms that do well in environmental matters are often all-round good performers: they also manage their staff and projects well, delivering quality service to happy clients. Not surprisingly, they also do well financially. By contrast, auditors who find poor performance in any one area – staff relations, financial management, client relations or the environment, usually see it across them all – and this inevitably reduces company profitability.

It turns out that environmental management is a very good proxy indicator for the overall quality of a company's management¹. So it's a great opportunity for companies to become more businesslike by focusing on improving their environmental and sustainability management systems.

And it spreads: firms that become more rigorous and thoughtful about such systems create an environment where everyone in the company becomes committed to doing better, enjoys learning new ways of doing things, sees the benefits, and becomes progressively more engaged and productive in all areas of their work.

It's ALL about your business!

“

Gains to business from the integration of environmentally sustainable practices into their day to day business practice can add up to 36% to their bottom line profit from reduced staff costs, expenses and risk, and increased revenue. *Bob Willard, author of "Next Wave" & "The Sustainability Wave"*



Question #5

What's the point of training staff when all they do is up and leave?

We've seen in Question 3 that providing good training for your staff is a great way to keep them on board: staff deprived of the right training will leave you, often in the first year, contributing to a very expensive and unnecessary turnover of staff.

What does the “right” training mean? Ben Horowitz says² that organisations need to do both functional training and management training.

Functional training is tailored to the specific job, so environmental training clearly falls into this category – environmental aspects, impacts and risks are unique to each sector and will vary somewhat from workplace to workplace within the same sector.

Management training, Ben says, defines your expectations of your management team to support their staff in applying what they have learned in their functional training. This is one of the most significant investments you can make in good training, as we'll see in Question 10.

As an example, below I've adapted Ben's advice specifically for environmental training. In your organisation, does the job description of supervisors, team leaders and managers include:

- holding regular 1:1 meetings with their employees?
- giving performance feedback that relates to the training objectives and content?
- training their people and supporting their application of new learning to the job?
- agreeing upon business and environmental objectives with their team?

It's easy to see that training is far from a one-off event for trainees: the whole organisation must support it.

And the more staff feel supported in their day-to-day work, the more likely they are to perform well, feel stimulated and valued in their work – and stay in the job or want to progress within the organisation. And if they do leave, they will be more likely to come back in due course, to add skills, experience and business value at a higher level.

“

There's only one thing worse than training your staff and having them leave, and that's NOT training them and having them stay.

Zig Ziglar



Question #6

I run a retail store in a big shopping mall – surely environmental training is irrelevant to me?

Much of my environmental training work has been with the heavily regulated civil construction sector. But on the very day I released the first edition of my book, I saw an online article³ saying that such is the drive for more sustainable retail in the UK that retail companies are recruiting entire sustainability teams – building a workforce of sustainability professionals in the retail sector.

This was exactly what I'd observed in all the many and varied sectors in which I've done environmental training. I was so thrilled to discover that others had observed the same thing, and in two such different sectors.

Rocky Mountain Institute's Amory Lovins says⁴ that retail shops with good daylighting show about 40% higher sales pressure – and that's on top of the energy savings. For offices, he notes¹ that “Efficient buildings in which you have better thermal, visual and acoustic comforts — where you can see what you're doing, hear yourself think, feel more comfortable and enjoy clean air — will typically yield [up to] 16% higher labor productivity.” He says the bottom-line benefits from this increased labor productivity are 1-1.5 orders of magnitude greater than from the energy savings themselves.

Given the highly competitive nature of retail these days, and the challenge from online vendors, attracting customers into stores is an issue of growing concern.

People may not even know why they are attracted into a given store, so you can also give more obvious signals around environment and sustainability – recycling and composting collection points in food halls, interpretation signs, great website information and more.

If you are an individual retail store owner or office manager, you may not need to become an environmental expert and train your staff – but you can make sure your business association or building manager has the right environmental experts on tap to do it with you. Follow the example of the leading companies in your sector.

Check out the job advertisements – you'll see environment and sustainability managers are sought-after in every sector, for the dollar savings and other business benefits they deliver.

Every job is a green job!

“

The only sustainable competitive advantage is an organization's ability to learn faster than the competition. *Peter Senge*



Question #7

What's the point of doing environmental training when it's impossible to measure the results?

It's both possible and important to measure results. Three things should – and can – be measured as part of your environmental training program: training outcomes, business outcomes and environmental outcomes.

Let's look at training outcomes first. Professional trainers recognise five levels of assessment of the effectiveness of training⁵:

- Level 1 – Reaction: Did your trainees like the training?
- Level 2 – Learning: What did they learn from it?
- Level 3 – Performance: What can they do as a result of it?
- Level 4 – Results: Was the training worthwhile?
- Level 5 – ROI: Did it produce a financial return on investment?

Each level of evaluation should also report on the results of the preceding levels. In practice, very few organizations go beyond Levels 1 or 2, and fewer still to Levels 4 or 5. Struggling to do it? Ask a professional trainer who specialises in learning and development for help. You should be able to get to dollar results if you think ahead – just as the two companies mentioned in Question 3 did.

Secondly, if you set measurable business objectives for your environmental training (and you should!), you'll be able to measure whether or not your training helped you meet them. Levels 4 and 5 evaluations should indicate the business results of your environmental training. Good environmental and sustainability training will improve business performance in measurable ways.

The third thing that needs measuring is environmental outcomes. Some measures of business efficiency will contribute to these, such as reductions in resource use, waste generation and carbon emissions. Environmental monitoring by or for the local environmental agency will also pick up differences that you and other firms have made, such as better water quality, air quality or water availability.

In every sphere of my work, I see people who back off from program monitoring and evaluation – they think it's too hard, or they're worried the results will show they have failed. However, in my experience, people who measure even a few indicators are in a stronger position to argue for their programs, and they learn along the way how to do better in terms of both what they do and how they measure it. What's not to like?

“

You can't manage what you don't measure. *Dr. Donald Huisingsh, Delft University*



Question #8

Are you telling me my environmental experts aren't good trainers?

In my experience, most SMEs, or environmental subject matter experts (that's what the professional trainers call us) are naturally good trainers.

But that's only the face-to-face and on-site stuff.

It's important for we environmental experts to recognise that training is a profession is every bit as specialised as the chosen field of any of us.

Do you want to:

- develop a training strategy that addresses functional and management training, individual and organisational development, risks and business outcomes?
- carry out a detailed training needs assessment?
- set up robust and relevant learning objectives?
- deliver captivating training?
- set up supervisors and managers with the knowledge, skills, systems and supplies they need to support workplace application of new learning?
- measure the effectiveness of your training program and its business results?

If you answered “yes” to one or more of these questions, then I strongly recommend that you look in-house for support from your learning and development team, or search for professional trainers near you, take a “train the trainer” course and join your local association of training and development.

As an environmental SME myself, I've belonged to my local association of training and development for 20 years, and I keep learning more and more all the time. I guarantee you will find belonging to your local equivalent extremely worthwhile and stimulating!

“

SMEs might be great at their jobs but they are not great trainers. “Just because someone knows the subject well, doesn't mean they can teach it.” SMEs have technical expertise. Professional trainers have expertise in facilitating learning. An SME is an experienced, smart person who can show people how to do the job and all they may need is some help on how to train effectively. Whenever you work with an SME, take them through a train-the-trainer and share with them your expertise. *Adapted from Bill Cushard, Allonhill*



Question #9

Our company is too small to do our own in-house training and we can't afford to pay environmental experts to come in and do it for us. Where can we get the help we need?

A 2014 survey⁶ of over 900 UK businesses said that while “environment and sustainability skills will be essential to plan the adaptations needed to survive and stay competitive, helping businesses adapt towards a ‘circular economy’, extracting the maximum value from materials and turning waste into resources”, many businesses say they are “ill-prepared for these growing challenges: they recognise the gravity of the threats but lack the necessary skills to face them head on and turn them to their advantage”. One of the findings was that 42% of the organisations surveyed had met barriers in securing environment/sustainability training, and these were, in order of most to least common:

- courses were too expensive or the organisation had a lack of budget
- lack of time
- no appropriate courses were available
- no local courses were available.

Try the options below to solve these problems:

- government bodies often run environmental training programs because the skills needed are seldom covered in tertiary qualifications or by other training providers. Ask your local council or environmental agency about what they offer: if available, such training is usually both affordable and up-to-the-minute
- ask your TVET (technical and vocational education and training) or other local industry training providers to work with industry and environmental agencies to add sector-specific environmental training to their core training courses
- ask your professional, business or industry association about developing environmental training for your sector. Sharing the costs across the membership is a very cost-effective solution: each of you can make an affordable contribution towards a more comprehensive training package.

You may also be able to get support through business or government incentive schemes – energy efficiency, fleet management, lean manufacturing, carbon reduction, supply chain management and waste minimisation are common examples of schemes with government subsidies or other support.

“

If we want to create a new world, we have to change our thinking and thinking patterns. 80% of the population think reactively: they take action to make something go away. The other 20% are creative thinkers - they take action to make something come into being.

Albert Einstein



Question #10

I send my staff on training – but then they come back and in a day or two, they're back to their usual bad habits. How do I get their training to stick?

It's no use sending staff to training if you don't give them the encouragement, time, budget and resources they need to put what they have learned to good effect.

There are two options for training:

1. spend your time and money and have it not work
2. invest a bit more time and money and have long-term retention of knowledge, skills and required/desired workplace performance and deliver demonstrable business results and financial ROI (return on investment).

This means that well ahead of the actual training, you need to think about what Ben Horowitz (see Question 5) calls “management training”: how will you support your management team so they can and will support their staff in applying what they have learned in their functional training? What measures will you need to put in place before, during and after the actual environmental training sessions?

Ralph Brown suggests⁷ that we clearly specify the roles that the trainer and key people in the organisation will play to ensure that trainees' new skills last. We need to train the supervisors and managers first, so they know how to support their staff members' ongoing learning in the workplace.

We need to help trainees move the new information and actions into long-term mind- and body-memory by allowing plenty of time for rehearsal, failure and trying key things again, with supportive feedback, both during and after the training itself.

Then we need to follow up a week, a fortnight, a month, three and six months later, before scheduling in refresher training: if it's important for them to get it right, make it important to support them.

That's just some of what it takes for training to be effective!

As Sir Richard Branson says, “Learning won't be restricted to set training periods, but will happen in all areas of your business, all day long.”

“

To have a learning organisation, you need to create a teaching organisation. *Rosabeth Moss Kanter, former Harvard Business Review editor*



10 questions about environmental training you've always wondered about – but been too scared to ask!

How the seven elements of successful environmental training apply to government-sponsored programs

These elements are not all sequential steps: you will need to carry out several at once and repeat them when needed.

Partnership is the fundamental platform for a successful environmental training program. From the first moment you think there is an environmental issue that workplace training could solve, you need to identify and approach the people within and beyond your organisation who will become your partners, and work with them through every element shown here.

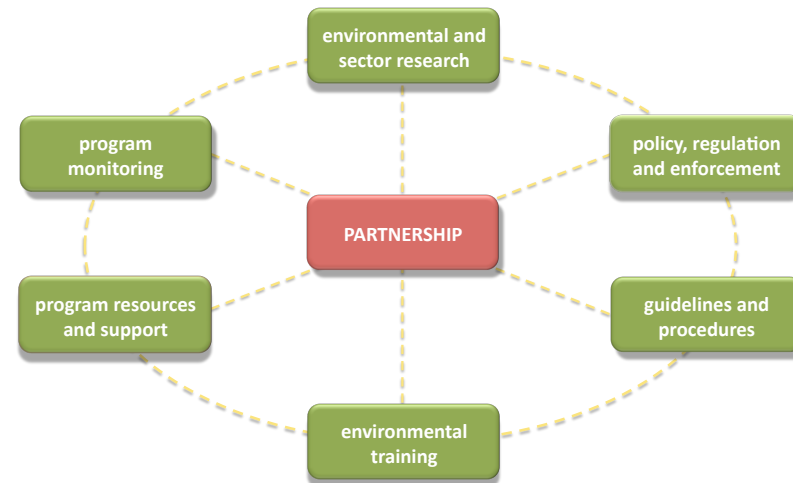
Your managers will want to know how well the training program and other elements (e.g. inspection and compliance) are being implemented; if the program is achieving its outcomes and if any unexpected or unwanted changes are occurring. This will enable you to work out, among other things, how well you understand what's going on in the human and environmental systems you're working with.

Resourcing all this work is important from Day 1. Every single element needs time and money, from coffee and cakes with your industry partners to the environmental and technical research needed to develop your guidelines and roll out your training and monitor its outcomes. Will it cost? Yes. Is it worth it? Yes, Yes and Yes again.

Good research is the second step in considering issues and solutions. Work with your partners and use baseline and other environmental data (e.g. pollution complaints) to define how serious the issue is and what objectives and outcomes you need. Ask: why is it an issue? For whom is it an issue? What is the temporal and spatial scale of the issue? How urgent is the issue? If it's serious enough to warrant action, then investigate the activities that cause the issue and, working with your industry partners, find out why they occur and investigate local and international information to work out what you can do about them.

You need some way to make sure that people causing the issue use the solutions you will be developing. This means you will need to put in place some kind of policy framework to require them to obtain permits and/or attend your training. You will also need an inspection and compliance monitoring and response framework, too, possibly including enforcement.

People need clear performance standards that they can meet in their workplace. Work with your industry partners to develop a guideline and/or procedures that tell them exactly what they need to do. This information is the basis of your policy, regulation, training and enforcement framework.



If your research indicates that training is a cost-effective way of addressing the issue, then being in your professional training partners and learning & development professionals: they will help your environmental experts develop and deliver great training that makes a difference.



10 questions about environmental training you've always wondered about – but been too scared to ask!

How the seven elements of successful environmental training programs apply to business initiatives

These elements are not all sequential steps: you will need to carry out several at once and repeat them when needed.

Partnership is the fundamental platform for a successful environmental training program. From the first moment you think there is an environmental issue that workplace training could solve, you need to identify and approach the people within and beyond your organisation who will become your partners, and work with them through every element shown here.

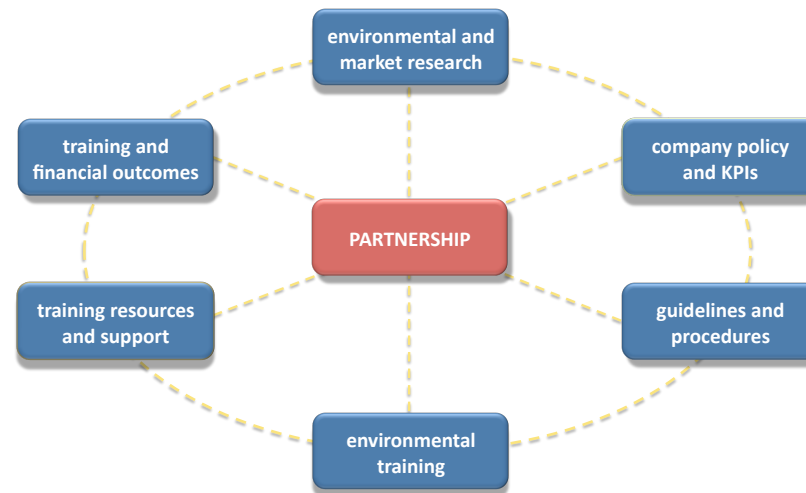
Your senior managers and board of directors will want to know how well the training program is being implemented, if the program is achieving its outcomes and what the business benefits – including financial ROI – of the training are. Monitor your business metrics. This will enable you to work out, among other things, how well you understand what's going on in the human and environmental systems you're working with.

Resourcing all this work is important from Day 1. Make sure you fund your staff to do it properly – asking them to do it on top of their existing workload or in their spare time sends a signal that it isn't very important to your firm. If the corporate culture isn't supportive, your training won't have the leverage to make the difference it needs to.

Good research is the next step in considering environmental issues and solutions for your business or sector. Work with your partners and find the business metrics you need to define how serious the issue is. How much time and money is it wasting? What are the risks? How much could it cost you in reputational damage? What are the opportunity costs? If it's serious enough to warrant action, then find out which activities cause the issue -and why. Then find local and international information on what you can do about them and what business results your training needs to achieve.

You need some way to make sure the issues and solutions have the company's full attention. Are they covered in your corporate policy, procedures and reporting? What job descriptions and KPIs do you need to put in place to create a supportive management framework for your training – that is, to make sure your trainees are able to apply their new learning back at work? What internal planning, response and audit procedures will you need?

Your staff need clear performance standards that they can meet. Are there guidelines and/or procedures available that tell them exactly what they need to do? If not, work with your wider industry and government partners to develop them in a cost-effective way.



If your research so far indicates that training is a cost-effective way of addressing the issue, then your internal and external human resources and learning & development professionals come to the fore. They will help your environmental experts develop and deliver great training that makes a difference. If your firm isn't big enough to roll out its own environmental training program, ask your industry association and/or environmental agency to develop a program for the whole sector.

Who will you talk to now and what will you do about it?

If you are already doing environmental training, then you will already have most if not all these elements in place, most likely in different places around your organisation, and can focus on consolidating and strengthening any weaker areas.

If you haven't started yet, then I hope the information in this small ebook gets you off to a good start.

There really has never been a better time to grow green jobs – decent jobs that make a difference to people and places. What are you waiting for?

Any more questions about environmental training?

Ask me via my website www.clarefeeney.com and see the answer on my blog at that website or in my next e-newsletter.

Find out more in my book and the 30+ free resources that go with it, at <http://www.clarefeeney.com/products>.

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