

Getting serious about sustainability

“For in the true nature of things, if we rightly consider, every green tree is far more glorious than if it were made of gold and silver.” – Martin Luther King

At the beginning of each year, we get together as a team to refine our strategy. This year, we also set time aside to confirm our values. I wanted us to cement our values in order for them to be a driver for everything we think, do and say and, ultimately, help with any the decisions we need to make. The Rotary’s

Four-Way Test is a great example of what I had in mind to achieve for our team. After a fun session of debate and deliberation, the team agreed on “authenticity, growth and respect” as our key drivers.

Each of these resonates deeply with us on a personal and business level. When stuck with

a decision, it really helps to use these values as a guide. The other day, we had a meeting with someone in the ‘environmental’ space. Being environmentally conscious has always been a key focus for us, which is evident from the long list of clients and projects that we are involved with. We were, therefore, keen to hear more. The innovation is impressive but, unfortunately,



it is imported from China and is shipped over to South Africa, thereby having an enormously high carbon footprint associated with it. When asked how they justify this carbon footprint, they said they rather don't think about it and avoid the question. During the conversation, it also became evident that they were purely after our database of clients and had no interest in the work we do. Having our values in place, we could then very quickly ascertain: authenticity—this company had none. How can you be in the 'environmental' space and justify importing a product via a high carbon footprint and a potential for oil pollution? Respect? There clearly wasn't any for the environment or for our business.

This was an unfortunate incident. There are, sadly, many businesses out there who say they wear a 'green' hat, but do they really? Does the environmental 'gene' filter through all the different business areas? Getting to the bottom of these answers, we saw this as a great opportunity to leverage off our successful methodology of our reputation measurement tool, the Repudometer[®], and give it a green filter to find out whether an organisation is perceived to be as green as they think and say they are. In order to provide greater reputation management support, we recently launched our "Sustainability Check", through which we assess how environmentally conscious and responsible an organisation is perceived to be. We help companies to check whether their stakeholders are aware of their sustainability commitments and can then pinpoint gaps that the business can use to up their green game.

We are seeing the pressure everywhere. On a personal level, we are feeling it with the water restrictions in Cape Town, while on a business level, 'green consumerism' is becoming a lot more significant. Contributing to the green economy is becoming non-negotiable.

How can we become more environmentally mindful? It does sometimes feel a bit overwhelming when deciding where to start and what to do. Extreme adventurer, Braam Malherbe's latest initiative is focused just on that—encouraging people to 'do one thing' (DOT) for the environment. He and Wayne Robertson have set out to row from Cape Town to Rio de Janeiro—unaided. They have also developed a DOT Challenge app, where you can log your 'DOT' for the environment and also challenge

others to get involved and to log their own DOTs. There are great, easy-to-implement ideas of how you can do one thing each day. Personally, my 'DOT' and challenge to everyone is to stop using straws. Also, consider showering with a bucket and use the grey water for watering your plants, this will really make you a lot more conscious of how much water can be saved and reused on a daily basis.

From a business point of view, the greatest negative environmental impact in a typical office setup is from the energy consumption of computers running throughout the day. The carbon dioxide emissions associated with this high rate of energy consumption is exorbitant. For every kilowatt-hour (kWh) of energy consumed, approximately 700g of carbon dioxide is released into the atmosphere. A desktop uses an average of 200W per hour and will run eight hours throughout the working day. This equates to a total of 175kg of carbon dioxide released per year for one desktop*. What is interesting to note is the fact that a computer's standby mode also uses energy. The best solution is to turn off all technology at the end of the day.

As part of our values, we've linked our own Corporate Social Investment (CSI) initiative to being more green-minded. One of the things we are doing this year is opting to invest in the future instead of buying flowers for someone's birthday, which we do by buying a tree for a reforestation project through Greenpop. I encourage you to have a look at their projects and see how you—either as an individual or through your organisation—can get involved to help them contribute to a sustainable future. ▲

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For more information about the DOT Challenge, visit www.dotchallenge.org

For more information about Greenpop, visit: www.greenpop.org

* <http://www.energiguide.be>
<http://bit.ly/2kJbl6Z>

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Regine Le Roux is the Managing Director and founder of Reputation Matters. She holds an M.Com degree in Communication Management from the University of Pretoria. She is a corporate reputation specialist and handpicks and manages several teams that conduct reputation research studies and implements business communication strategies. Regine is the author of: Reputation Matters, Building blocks to becoming the business people want to do business with. Regine is the Chairperson for the Western Cape Public Relations Institute of Southern Africa (PRISA) Committee, and on the Board of the Rotary Club of Newlands, responsible for Public Image, and chairs Rotary International's Public Image for District 9350. Over weekends you will find her donning her pink skort for the Hout Bay Harriers.