

Sustainability: an important consideration in the war to win talent

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Sustainability has become a priority for businesses in recent years in terms of attracting and retaining talent. Growing concerns around climate change have resulted in many jobseekers (particularly within the 23-38 age bracket) proactively seeking employment at companies that are eco-friendly. As such, companies wishing to earn the coveted title of 'Employer of Choice' and attract talent in a skills-scarce world would do well to consider adopting sustainable practices to set themselves apart from the competition.



Here are four reasons that sustainability may be a key differentiator.

1. Sustainability and recruitment go hand in hand

Being a sustainable business is important to attract talent. In a Deloitte survey, 49% of Gen Zs and 44% of millennials said that they had made career choices based on their personal ethics. With an increasing need for talent, not focusing on sustainability can lead to a corporation losing out to competitors who are.

South Africa is currently facing a skills shortage. Employers who demonstrate a clear commitment to reducing carbon emissions and helping tackle the climate crisis may get the upper hand in not only attracting the country's most sought-after employees, but retaining them by offering them eco-friendly initiatives. While organisations need to rethink their practices, businesses that can't communicate their environmental record could potentially suffer.

PWC reported in *The future of work: A Journey to 2022* that "65% of people around the world want to work for an organisation with a powerful social conscience" and "36% of HR professionals are building their talent strategies around their organisations' social and environmental conscience."

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2. Sustainability creates a “sweet spot” for employees

When a company invests in green initiatives, this signals to jobseekers that it cares about the environment and the world we live in – which means the company likely cares about the people it hires. Employer branding provides an opportunity to showcase a company’s sustainability practices to prospective employees. One of the best ways to do this is to illustrate the concern for the environment by demonstrating how your company’s sustainability efforts are directly tied to the employee experience.

On its website, Unilever defines its Sustainability Strategy as follows: Our purpose is to make sustainable living commonplace. It’s why we come to work. It’s why we’re in business. It’s how we inspire exceptional performance.

3. Company reputation

Today, sustainability initiatives have a massive impact on a company’s reputation. The attraction of the best talent is heavily dependent on a strong reputation. For a company looking to hire, their reputation is the employer brand, which includes core values, company culture and any sustainability initiatives.

Naturally, eco-friendly practices elevate a company’s reputation, and potential employees believe that they would feel proud representing the organisation. Workplaces can showcase their distinctive reputation for sustainability by seeking recognition and awards from third-party organisations and genuine employee testimonials.

Global wine and spirits group, Pernod Ricard, showcases employee testimonials on its website. One of its employees had this to say: “Looking after our people and our planet are both personal and professional commitments, and I love that I get to work for an organisation that takes sustainability as seriously as I do!”

In this digital age, it’s never been easier for prospective employees to find out information about a company, whether that’s on the website or through social media. That’s why reputation management for businesses is key for shaping how people think and feel about your company. By taking active action to make your company more sustainable, you can send out the right messages and elevate the status of your company – which can help attract the top talent.



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4. The future is green

There’s no doubt that companies which develop and maintain sustainable practices will be much more resilient in the future. These companies will be able to future-proof their recruitment and continue to attract job seekers who are looking for like-minded companies. For companies looking to become more sustainable, there needs to be a mix of different approaches across the business.

For example, this could include partnering with other organisations and ensuring that leadership teams are reinforcing sustainability. More and more people are looking for companies that take proactive steps to make a difference. As awareness of climate change continues to grow in the future, the bar for sustainability will rise even further, so businesses looking to recruit need to make sure they’re always engaging with environmental, economic and societal issues, as well as corporate governance.

Local retail giant, The Foschini Group (TFG), has gone to great lengths to reduce its carbon emissions, including increasing its resource efficiency at their head office, distribution centres and stores as well as making more environmentally aware choices in terms of the products that they buy and manufacture. The group is also working towards a goal of zero waste and are committed to the Plastic Pact — they are one of the founding members of the South African Plastic Pact.

Leading adventure product and clothing retailer, Cape Union Mart is committed to protecting the great outdoors. They stock and supply a range of recyclable products — including their popular K-Way jacket range, sleeping bags, water bottles and recycled packaging. The company's head office is also part of Cape Town's waste minimisation and recycling programme, which focuses on in-house recycling.



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Parting thoughts

A sustainability ethos that complements a company's people practices has a higher chance of standing out in the job market. Through introducing simple "green savvy" challenges, such as cycling to work, recycling waste, and wearing second-hand clothing, you are engaging your employees in your sustainable endeavours. A 'green employee of the month' prize can go a long way in communicating your company ethos.

Recently, businesses including Unilever, Interface, Ikea, and DSM have come together to craft a 10-point plan to revamp corporate purpose by offering recommendations to tackle climate crisis and social inequalities.

As more and more companies are adapting to the new environmental demands from employees, new job positions are starting to emerge. Having a sustainability expert join the team positions the company as an eco-friendly leader and enables it to implement the best practices. This is referred to as sustainability recruitment.

Through building a network of sustainability professionals, companies are also opening their door to new clients who can benefit from the specialised eco-friendly services. It's a win-win!

The solutions to a more sustainable future are definitely there, yet one question remains: are businesses ready to make the change and join the party of eco-conscious leaders? Only future recruitment trends will show.

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