

Championing the cause

Does a company need a sustainability champion to change, and should it be the CEO? By **CAITLIN SYKES**



Cleaning company Paramount Services use eco-friendly products to help reduce its impact on the environment

GALVIN BARTLETT is a boss who's not afraid to get his hands dirty. When he wanted to verify the performance of biodegradable rubbish bin liners for use in his cleaning company, Paramount Services, he put the product in his own compost bin.

Bartlett is passionate about sustainability issues and his leadership is driving significant change in the company he founded in 1979. Paramount has around 200 staff and a further 100 franchises serving about 800 clients around New Zealand. Leading a company that deals with the waste of so many businesses has given Bartlett a unique perspective.

"When you're working at the level that we do, you're seeing it all and it's huge, and certainly there's a lot of unnecessary waste," he says.

"What we were doing in the 60s and 70s is just not acceptable — throwing rubbish, or crap for want of a better word, into the land and not caring about the consequences."

The company started processing waste as a service to clients, which has allowed it to measure what gets sent to landfill. While business at Paramount has doubled over the

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last three years, the amount of waste going to landfill has stayed the same, representing an effective reduction of 50%.

And the company can do better, says Bartlett, believing it can reduce that further to 20% of the current total. Establishing inhouse recycling systems for clients — including a 'ban the bin' policy in favour of a paper recycling tray at each desk — is driving reductions. One client, for example, is now sending just 15% of its total waste to landfill thanks to recycling systems instituted with Paramount, and Bartlett believes that level can reduce to around 4% with further reprocessing and removing food content for compost.

Other sustainability efforts at Paramount include using eco-friendly cleaning products, offering daytime cleaning services to minimise power use, and reducing paper-based communication with clients by

maximising IT solutions. But Bartlett wasn't always so conscious of sustainability issues.

"In the early stages of Paramount we were using all the nasties everyone else was using in terms of chemicals and tipping all our waste [water] in the stormwater," he admits.

"It's an education process. For an avid diver who's keen on the sea, then tipping out stuff that goes into the sea, you've got to wonder where we were coming from."

Bartlett says clients are increasingly susceptible to the sustainability message but it has to be championed from the top to be effective.

"If management aren't committed to it then it's not going to work."

Steve Bonnici, founder and managing director of courier company Urgent Couriers, agrees. Bonnici has driven exceptional sustainability measures in his own business, including becoming the country's first



OfficeMax's Green Star 4-rated head office in Highbrook, South Auckland

transport company to have its entire operation certified carbon neutral, but has also taken a broader leadership role through his involvement with organisations such as the New Zealand Business Council for Sustainable Development. He's seen frustration among sustainability managers in companies where the CEO isn't also on board. "The person at the top has to get it, understand it." CEOs can drive the cause by clearly stating a vision and giving staff the opportunity to contribute ideas, he says.

But success ultimately requires a collective effort, he says. "I can't implement everything. The other people in the team have got to understand it and be living it as well."

It's an approach exemplified by office products company OfficeMax. Its sustainability initiatives have been driven by managing director Kevin Obern and its national health, safety and environment coach, but the company has also instituted a group of around 20 'Triple R Champions' to back up the reduce, reuse and recycle message at the coalface.

The company has around 850 staff spread throughout 22 sites around the country,

says national health, safety and environment coach Karen Moller, and it was ideal for people at each site to manage the practical implementation of the initiatives.

"These are people who are passionate about the environment and wanted to do their thing," says Moller of the volunteers.

Max Boniface is among the Triple R Champions working at OfficeMax's Green Star 4-rated head office in Highbrook, South Auckland.

"The idea is to filter it down to everybody in the company so they know what's going on and they can help facilitate that," says Boniface.

"I put my hand up because I didn't know a lot about ways to help the environment. For a selfish reason, I guess, I wanted to understand what we could do in terms of the environment and I was hoping to apply it at home."

One of the causes Boniface champions is

the company's 'hit it off' initiative to reduce power consumption. Each week he'll do a regular sweep as well as a spot check of his assigned area in the office to ensure lights and computer monitors are switched off and leave reminder notes for power wasters. He also took part in the company's inaugural waste audit, sorting and weighing two days' worth of waste to measure a starting point for further reductions.

Boniface reckons simple sustainability messages and initiatives that aren't time consuming have been crucial to get buy-in from staff.

And, as he'd hoped, his involvement in sustainability at work has also paid off at home. "Now I find myself thinking about everything I put in the rubbish. I'm actually thinking about 'where is that going to go, and can that be recycled?'... and hopefully I've helped other people do the same thing."

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