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“LEED” the Way – A Project Manager’s Role in Making Sustainability Sustainable

Sustainability makes good business sense. It’s easy to say that you’re committed to being green, but it’s not always so easy to truly be green. Imagine a landfill overflowing with construction debris – aged carpet, old ceiling tiles, drywall fragments and worn furniture. Each day, on any given project around the country, Project Managers are making decisions that affect our environment. As a Project Manager, it’s important to make a choice that counts.

One of the many roles a Project Manager takes on is to have a thorough understanding of the sustainability efforts a project takes to be “green.” This can be accomplished through knowledge of the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design certification process, interaction and membership with the U.S. Green Building Council, being a LEED Accredited Professional, collaboration with other LEED AP’s and sustainability focused professionals and, finally, involvement on LEED certified projects. The Green Series and GreenBuild, both industry sponsored events, are also good exposure to what it means to be green.

You may ask: Exactly what does it mean to be “green”? Buzz words such as reduce, recycle, renew, repurpose, reclaim, reuse and refresh all circulate in the project management industry – but what can be relied on is that it takes commitment, education and knowledge to make sustainability sustainable. “Green” is the concept that the environmentally based decisions we make today will resound tomorrow. Being green is more than a trend or a fad, it is a



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concept and methodology that is changing the way buildings are designed, built and occupied. In many cases, it’s no longer an afterthought – instead, it is an expectation. In fact, many clients publish their commitment to environmental stewardship – whether in their annual reports, on their Web sites or through the products they sell. They recognize that within their own business plans, sustainability is key for their future and they have a firm grasp that a green building not only enhances their public image or mirrors their corporate message, but also demonstrates social responsibility.

The U.S. Green Building Council’s Green Building Rating System is the recognized industry standard for certification of buildings based on a point system spanning Certified, Silver, Gold and Platinum and consisting of categories such as: sustainable sites, water efficiency, energy and atmosphere, materials and resources, indoor environmental quality (IEQ) and innovation. Existing Buildings, Core and Shell, Commercial Interiors and New Construction are all project types that can be certified. The fact that buildings account for 39 percent of our CO₂ emissions in the United States is a staggering fact that has professionals taking notice. LEED 2009 is reshaping the way we think and challenging professionals with a new rating system that will reset the bar for sustainable building leadership. This will result in a new LEED v3, currently in the public comment process and anticipated to be more intuitive for users, more adaptive and flexible and, most importantly, more directly linked to improve human and environmental health. Given that 1.1 billion square feet is already registered for LEED, these new developments will surely drive market transformation and help professionals become more fully engaged with LEED.

Project Managers, Developers, General Contractors, Landlords, Architects, Engineers, Furniture Manufacturers and LEED Consultants are all stakeholders in creating benefits to the built project. Improving energy efficiency, guiding the client to chose products that are environmentally thoughtful, increasing indoor air quality, driving a reduction in water

quantity needed, supporting alternative energy sources and rewarding alternative transportation collectively creates change. In addition, it is important to dispel myths and educate others on the positive impacts of LEED. These include improvements to building operations and economics, an increase in asset value and the positive impacts a sustainable design can make – such as an increase in worker productivity, direct correlations to less absenteeism and increased employee morale, as well as enhancements to occupant safety and health. In collaboration with other forward thinkers in the project’s lifecycle, the Project Manager invests in the ongoing commitment to build projects that last.

It’s being said that the outside is the new inside and that tree houses are being built in concrete jungles. These sustainable projects are the future of our industry and we, as Project Managers, need to be committed to strengthening a project with the knowledge, the benefits and the success that comes from creating and managing a sustainable project and, therefore, contributing to a sustainable society. The Project Manager, with the Project Team, is accountable and responsible for the advocacy and support of reducing environmental impact in all phases of the project’s lifecycle. Being committed to participating in a greener earth through our projects, contributions and commitment – personally and professionally – will be an important role for the future of Project Management.