MANAGEMENT PRACTICE

Assessment Three

JULY 12, 2020

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My sustainability journey is shaped by my climate change experience and my fears of a world without change. I do believe that there has been growth in my awareness and understanding. All molded by this programme of Sustainability Leadership from the University of Wales Trinity Saint David. Now more knowledgeable than I was two years ago, I am striving to be a change maker and a driver in the sustainability movement that is just budding in the Caribbean region.

In particular, there were two life changing sustainability awareness moments in my life. The first occurred in 2012 during the Islands of the World XII conference that was held in the British Virgin Islands from 29 May to 1 June 2012. That multi-day event covered various subjects that require small islands to make urgent change. It was a gathering that attracted scholars from around the world. These learned persons weighed in all of the conversations. However, as an observer taking it all in one particular topic and the resulting discussion held my attention. That topic was – "Alternative Energy, Sustainable Development and Climate Change." The sticking message was that small islands like the British Virgin Islands can become extinct by climate change as a result of rising sea levels.

While my first experience of hearing about possible extinction certainly made an impact by making me aware of climate change; and led me to learning more about sustainability. It was not enough to jolt me to act or play any role in helping to make sustainable changes either within the organization I work or in my personal life. In fact, it took the traumatic experience of not knowing whether my family and I would survive that dreadful day of 6 September 2017.

That day in September there was collective praying as the doors and the windows of our home blow off and hurricane Irma rushed in. The horror that night of not knowing if the door of the bedroom which was keeping us and the neighbours safe was going to hold. As the water level in the room rose and the terrifying sound of the wind gushing and destroying our living room continued I felt certain that we would not survive.

We did survive, then--- it was on to dealing with the pain that came as I loaded the last item that I prized onto the truck hired to take all of my water damaged items to the garbage dump. Things that took me years to acquire, including my diplomas and other important documents all damaged by the gutting that Hurricane Irma did to my apartment that horrible day.

This traumatic experience waked my desire to take action and influenced new thinking in how I view sustainability; because this horrid hurricane was a product of climate change; and sustainable living was a way to take action. Therefore, I decided that formal education was essential for such a transition.

Looking back, I am reminded of that one line from one of my favorite movies of the early 90s. It is a line that always stuck with me – "when the student is ready the teacher would appear." That was exactly how it happened when I stumbled across the Sustainability

Leadership Course at the UWTSD. It was such a euphoric moment that I picked up the phone and called the university immediately. I remember the joy I felt when the person on the other end after I giddily explained my interest in the course said: "Dr. Bell is right here one moment."

At the end of the conversation I had purpose; but after reflecting on what being in the course would take I became unsure. The issue was, I was also in another programme; and couldn't afford to do two. That meant I had to find a way to get out of it. Financially and emotionally I had no idea how I was going to do this course because there was so much going on in my life at that time; plus all of documents required went to the dump previously; and there was a deadline. Nonetheless, it all worked out; and now as I approach the end of this part of the journey I am finally preparing to take my entrepreneurial interest forward.

Moving Forward

In life timing is everything; and I do believe that now is the time for me to fully dive into fully launching my business development company and trying to be that catalyst for change that is required to bring sustainability awareness to as many in the region.

The devastation of hurricanes Dorian, Irma, and Maria; as well as the sudden changes that were brought by COVID 19 has made corporate leaders aware of how sudden their manner of doing business can be altered. As such more businesses in the Caribbean are willing to make the paradigm shift that includes more sustainable operations with a sound business continuity and agile plans. One of the areas that is being looked at more favorably is doing business digitally. Previously many Caribbean companies were only half-heartedly attempting to digitize their business, but now are more open to that. This is a great opportunity for a small business support/development company.

On a personal level I am most intrigued by the theories and practices of the circular economy. The message of reduce, reuse and recycle is something that I am already implementing in my life. For this reason, I was happy to see at the government of the British Virgin Islands role out a version of this theory by dubbing it the 7R Waste Management Strategy. That Strategy which was unveiled on April 3 to accommodate residents during the COVID 19 24-Hour curfew calls for Reform; Restrict; Reduce; Recycle; Reuse; Return and Rethink in terms of waste disposing. This approach was in some ways an upgrade from the 3R principle I was previously trying to practice and I am wholeheartedly utilizing the 7Rs going forward.

At this stage of my personal sustainability journey I feel as though my future and present plans for contribution to this global sustainability vision have merged. As was noted earlier this merger was made possible by this dreadful COVID 19 pandemic that devastated businesses around the world. Here in the region though the situation is grim for small businesses it has had a positive impact in the way companies view change. It would have been a harder battle to convince business owners to alter certain practices earlier; but now based on some of the recent conversations that I have been having there has clearly

been a change in thinking; and an opportunity for me to take the sustainability message forward.

During the modules of this programme there have been many points of contemplation that have led to the alteration of the services and even the nature of my company/business. Again, there was new perspective. For instance, in 2017 we were about to launch the Jamaica Branch, but now we are almost ready to have arms in Barbados and Trinidad as well – which means that this message of sustainability can be shared to all of the four major CARICOM countries Guyana, Barbados, Jamaica, and Trinidad.

My eyes were opened to the matter of sustainability reporting which is something that I am continuing to learn about. Similarly, as a marketing person, the lesson on greenwashing was also an eye opener.

Needless to say, the understanding I previously had in sustainable development has grown exponentially since I commenced this programme, but what was more transformational was my understanding of leadership because the two are intricately linked. Another thing that stuck with me during this programme was the power of collaboration; which I intend to use as a tool to move forward various sustainability initiatives.

Sitting like everyone in the Caribbean in September, 2019 as hurricane Dorian pummeled the Bahamas and lingered for days wreaking havoc and devastation. The trauma of the BVI's own September disaster was the relived. The plight of the Bahamas also had businesses in a frenzy here that were still in recovery mode. Some business leaders inquired what they can do in their business to ensure resilience. For me, this was a wonderful knowledge exchange moment. What was most important was that after having this conversation and sharing some of the plans I have actually earned clients; and found collaborators for initiatives that are still in the pipeline. Most times this connection feels like a small private sustainability focused network.

At this juncture of my sustainability journey I feel like the clichéd ostrich that has had its head buried in the sand; in this instance my head has been buried for years. Most of all I feel like I have awoken from a deep and long sleep where I was out of the loop on matters of climate change and other matters resulting from unsustainability. Now I feel compelled to take action or join causes that are geared towards ensuring that generations to come have a chance to enjoy life in a vibrant environment.