

## Session A: Leadership

### Strategic Corporate Social Responsibility

Open Space Interactive Session Summary  
Thursday, November 5, 2009 – 11:15 – 12:45pm

#### Moderator

- >> **Myrna Khan**, VP and General Manager, Canadian Business for Social Responsibility

#### Speakers

- >> **Yolanda Banks**, Senior CSR Advisor, Export Development Canada
- >> **Jeffrey Hollender**, Chair and Chief Inspired Protagonist, Seventh Generation Inc.
- >> **Adine Mees**, President & CEO, Canadian Business for Social Responsibility
- >> **Bob Willard**, Author of *The Sustainability Champion's Guidebook*

#### Key Messages

- >> The untapped potential of employee engagement has been completely underestimated.
- >> When communicating the need for change, do not only impose your ideas. People must realize the importance of the issue on their own, and thus take greater responsibility for their actions.
- >> Being patient. Understanding the reality and listening is vital to transformation.

#### Worth Repeating

*“Surround yourself with very smart people; form an advisory group for yourself and think about what it is that you need, what is missing and how you can attain it to achieve your goal.”*

– Adine Mees

*“Maintain your perseverance and energy. Things do not change over night. It is an accumulation of small changes.”*

– Yolanda Banks

*“Learn the art of connecting with people in a way that works for them. You must give [people] a chance to rethink their approaches in a non-punishing environment.”*

– Bob Willard

*“Every single interaction with every person is a way to help them feel more hope in the world.”*

– Jeffrey Hollender

#### Summary

This session dived into the personal leadership experiences of the panel, in order to gain insight into their journeys to becoming successful CSR pioneers from the top, within and from the outside of their organizations. Personal experience with transformation is not a singular experience. Each individual may or

## Transformational Corporate Social Responsibility

may not have their moment of epiphany and develop different approaches to transformation. Through experience, these leaders have realized what has worked and has not worked for them.

Yolanda Banks was always interested in international development issues, and Adine Mees had the influence of progressive parents. Bob Willard was oblivious until he was personally affected by detrimental plans for a water treatment facility near his home. For Jeffrey Hollender, his life journey involved periods where he only cared about money and it was not until a moment on a TV show where the host deemed him unethical, that he realized he had to change his ways. The statement fuelled his self-reflection and eventually the start of Seventh Generation Inc.

When asked what has worked well and what hasn't in leading CSR changes from the top, within and from the outside, Banks advised that one should first think strategically about how decisions are made within the organization. This will help in developing a strategy to influence major decisions. Second, she learned from her experience that if given the chance to start over again, she would have changed her communication style in a way that would allow her messages to sink in more effectively. Being upfront and telling staff what they were doing wrong did not work. Instead, she has learned to harness energy in order to push, prod and cajole people to become inspired by their work.

Mees recommended understanding the reality of what you are trying to influence or change. She spent time working in all business units of her company, while completing her MBA, to gain a holistic understanding of the way the business functioned. For Willard, he regards his life as a series of detours. However, learning from his mistakes was the way he was able to become a more effective and better person overall. When trying to effect change, he insists that you must honour the mindset of the person or company you are trying to influence. You cannot only be an external critic, but show trust in your relationship with them. The journey may be slower at the beginning, but it will be faster in the long term.

At Seventh Generation, Hollender found that hiring diversely was very effective, as the differences in talent complemented each other. However, he hires first based on values rather than skill sets. He believes that skills can be gained, but it is much harder to change one's core value system. Bob further added that a great way to have a successful team is to hire people with a consistent value system, but share diverse thinking. In this way, employees' skills may complement each other to effectively strive toward a unified vision.

Moving forward into the future of corporate social responsibility, the leaders envisioned different scenarios. Hollender believes that there is a large need for stakeholders to come together to find a common solution and institutionalized process. There is a huge need for best case practices of collaboration and a redefinition of the balance sheet. Banks believes that the future will unfold in an accumulation of small changes. Mees foresees moving from our current compartmentalized approach to a systems-thinking approach, where governance is a vital component. Willard sees a proliferation of creative business plans with more employee engagement models and a transition off of fossil fuels. He is personally trying to walk the talk and has decided to not fly for an entire year.

There is no one path, but instead many unique ways for an individual to become a leader from the top, within and from the outside of an organization.