

Is Your Law Firm Ready to “Go Green”?*

By Glenda C. Raley

An increasing number of law firms are exploring what it takes to “Go Green.” As they do the research and learn to separate fact from fiction, they are learning that sustainable practices can have a positive impact on their firm, their employees, their reputation and even their bottom line.

By taking the first step of deciding to protect the environment, you will soon discover that there are many things your firm can do that are no cost or low cost. As your program grows you may begin to add things to your budget that will further enhance sustainability. You may even enhance your profits as clients have begun to ask what firms are doing environmentally and are choosing to do business with those that have sound environmental policies.

Those firms wishing to take a big plunge into the world of Green can apply to have their office buildings LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certified. To achieve LEED certification, the building is rated on a points system with four possible rankings – Certified, Silver, Gold, and Platinum. LEED was developed by The United States Green Building Council, an independent agency that sets the standards of what it means to build in a sustainable way.

If you are not ready to start with a project as large as LEED certification for your upcoming construction, there are many other ways to begin with smaller initiatives in your existing building. One way to start is by establishing a Green Committee.

Going Green

When you establish your Green Committee you may be surprised by the interest it will garner among the various ranks in your firm. By combining a talent pool made up of attorneys, managers, and staff you will find ideas and suggestions that will have your firm rallying around your Green project in full force. As you learn about how others in the community are doing their part to go Green, you will discover how easy it is to be a part of saving the planet.

So – are you ready to Go Green? Here are 20 suggestions to get you started in small ways that can have big payoffs:

- Establish a Green Committee in your firm.
- Adopt and post a sustainability policy in the office and roll out a firm wide announcement about the initiative.
- Buy office paper that has at least 30 percent post-consumer recycled content.
- Institute double-sided copying for drafts and internal documents.
- Meet with your building management to review waste and recycling policies and procedures and recycle everything you can, including glass bottles, aluminum cans, batteries, plastic bags, Tyvek envelopes and cardboard.
- Recycle printer cartridges and buy recycled cartridges.
- Adopt a policy to encourage employees to turn off lights and other equipment at the end of the day

when not in use.

- Switch to T-8 energy efficient bulbs.
- Begin to replace office electronics (printers, copiers, etc.) with “Energy Star” certified devices.
- Use reusable plates, cups, glasses and utensils in the kitchen and conference rooms rather than disposables.
- Require cleaning contractors to use environmentally friendly cleaning products.
- Convert inter-office memos and reports to e-mail instead of paper.
- Provide recycling bins.
- Put recycling bins throughout the firm – kitchens, conference rooms – so that clients can see the firm takes this seriously.
- Encourage employee use of car pooling, biking, mass transit or other measures to reduce the energy used by employees for commuting and other firm travel.
- Set up a re-use center for binders, folders, clips and other office supply items.
- Develop a policy on data and document storage to minimize the use of paper through I-manage or other document management vehicle.
- Choose hotels and conference centers with Green practices for your firm events and communicate these to all employees.
- Consider sustainability in the purchase of supplies, equipment and services based on recyclability, biodegradability, recycled content, waste minimization and energy conservation.
- Use lunch vendors whose packaging is reusable, recyclable, or biodegradable.

More and more law firms are Going Green — don’t be left out. It takes very few resources to get started. Not only will you feel good about your firm’s efforts to help the environment, you will also foster teamwork, client appreciation, and have some fun in the process. There is a lot of information available on sustainability, so begin your research, assemble your team and get ready to Go Green! It’s the right thing to do.

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