

The Environmental Consultants

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For the most part, it would be easy to say that the region has not responded well to global issues of climate change and ecological protection. On the whole this is true, but as the pages of this magazine demonstrate, there is an appetite for change in this regard, and there are a number of bright new initiatives out there - amongst them is the environmental consultancy 'Equilibrium'.



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Since its launch three years ago, joint Managing Directors of Equilibrium; Sandra Al Saleh and Reham Al Samerai, have set about highlighting the need for a greater awareness of the consequences of climate change to this region, and how changes made to the way we impact the environment here can affect - and improve - the current and future lives of our global brothers and sisters.

What is the purpose of your company?

We are environmental consultants. We advise companies on their best approach to these issues, and on how they can change their methods to better consider the environment, and also improve their business. We demonstrate how companies, and individuals, can change their lives to live in harmony with the world around us.

The inspiration for Sandra's involvement in and passion for the environment stems from a 2006 Arctic expedition she joined, as she says "That just transformed the way I look at things, I realised that someone, we all, have to do something about this".

The last few years have seen a dramatic increase in the amount of attention the media has given to environmental issues. Al Gore's film 'An Inconvenient Truth' is often held up as being 'the

tipping point' when 'green' became mainstream. Do you agree?

I think his film certainly changed the way we were talking about these things. People have been aware of climate change, and the reasons for it, for decades. Scientists at least were broadly in agreement, but there were other interested parties who sought to hide the truth so they could continue reaping the benefits from their businesses that were, and still are, harming the world. But certainly, today, environmental issues are the concern of a well-informed public. I think this has provided the catalyst for change we see amongst us today.

So, now you have companies coming to you asking for advice. The cynic in me has the feeling that they may not all be coming to you purely with the ideal dream of helping save the planet, sometimes I wonder if they wish to have a 'green' image simply from a 'public relations' point of view. Is my cynical side correct?

It would be untrue to say that, on occasions, we advise companies that do not wholeheartedly embrace an environmental ethos, but regardless of this - they get the same advice as any company that seeks our expertise. And when they see that they can also improve the efficiency of their company, it's not surprising to see them



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convinced of the actions we recommend. Regardless, where there's a will from a company to improve its environmental performance, there's always a way we can help. Invariably though, companies and individuals do ultimately want to see a better world - they are often simply a little confused in regard to what they can do.

What sort of companies come to you for help?

Generally they are smaller companies - office based businesses. Investment companies, publishers, service-based businesses.

Ok. So what could I do? What's the one thing I could easily do that would make a difference?

They laugh at my offer to make just one change to my life, but they make a number of easily achievable suggestions.

Take a shorter shower in the morning. Turn off the lights when you don't need them. Close the curtains or blinds in the heat of the day - you'll be amazed at how much lower your consumption of electricity used for air-conditioning will be. Stop eating meat.

I was all for their suggestions until they proposed that I stop eating meat. I didn't like the sound of this. They explained a little further, and revealed some rather alarming figures I had previously been unaware of:

To produce one beef burger requires 2,400 liters of water. One kilo of beef requires 15,500 liters.

I further learned that the animal will have consumed nearly 1,300kg of grains (wheat, oats, barley etc) and 7,200kg of roughages (pasture, dry hay etc) during its lifetime. Beef and dairy animals also produce copious volumes of methane which as it is expelled becomes a powerful greenhouse gas. A single slice of bread requires 40 liters. Astonishing.

Do you feel any sense of urgency towards these issues amongst people these days?

Oh certainly. And increasingly so. It has gone beyond rumour and hearsay now. There are islands which are being permanently evacuated due to rising sea-water, coastal regions are threatened, the world's deserts are expanding, we can see and feel the climate is changing here across the Gulf region. It's easy to think, even now, that this is all 'someone else's problem', but it's a global concern, and it is good to see that people are becoming concerned.

Surely the lead must come from government bodies? The lead on this must be taken not only from the private sector, but also by the public?

That's right. And the problem in the region is that, right now, this just isn't happening. Everyone has a role to play



here though. The governments can drag their heels if they wish because at the moment there isn't the real push from the people to see that something is being done. There are wonderfully supportive people in the public sector who are really trying to encourage others to change but it takes time, and this region is very much in its infancy with regard to environmental and climate change awareness.

What we have to do now is to create enough awareness and enough of a focus to enable people to push for change. We're at a stage now where private businesses find it profitable to do things that are environmentally friendly.

Here in Kuwait, energy consumed has little value. I fill my car with petrol for very little cost, my electricity bills at home are tiny - and many people get away without even paying them, and I have no idea what the water I use costs because my landlord doesn't charge me for it. Surely this also has to change?

Exactly. Aside from anything else, while this situation continues it makes it much harder for us to 'sell' the whole idea of our clients profiting from being more environmentally aware. In most

of the world, where these commodities have a true value, a businessman will see immediately the benefit of turning down the air-conditioning. Here, there is a much smaller cash benefit, and the idea that they may be saving some islanders or coastal-dwellers from future flooding is sometimes not yet enough to convince them to make the switch.

Yet the tide (if you'll pardon the pun) is turning.

Although their company - Equilibrium - is only about as old as the very young environmental movement in Kuwait itself, Sandra and Reham have seen huge steps made by businesses in addressing their responsibility towards environmental concerns. And this acceptance of responsibility is accelerating.

Were I a businessman charged with the task of deciding whether or not to make changes within my company - I'd want to be the one to look back in years to come and say in truth that I'd tried to make a difference.

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