

Measuring Footprints

By Diane Dietz The Register-Guard
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While the business world is scratching its head over what exactly global warming and peak oil mean to its operations, owners of Good Company of Eugene know that, for them, it means green — as in lots of greenbacks.

Principals Joshua Skov and Joshua Proudfoot started Good Company seven years ago, and were poised to capitalize on the growing, and serious, interest in environmental issues in corporate and government offices.

Their new customers are no longer of the weavers-of-recycled-yoga-mats ilk, but conservative, major employers such as Wells Fargo bank and the Oregon Department of Transportation. Those organizations are finding that to prosper, they've got to show some environmental chops — and that's where Good Company enters the picture.

Good Company advises these mega customers on how to measure, manage and market their environmental and social performance.

The firms are ready to answer the question of the moment, which is: “Hey, why aren't you doing more on (blank)?” Skov said. Fill in the blank: Global warming, peak oil, toxics reduction. “It's an opportunity to say: ‘Actually, we're doing quite a bit. Here's what we're doing, and we have a plan to do more,’ ” Skov said.

Reporting becomes de rigueur

Over the past five years, it's become essential for businesses and governments to prepare a report on their environmental and social performance, said Chad Upham, a 2007 graduate of Presidio School of Management in San Francisco and a specialist on corporate responsibility reporting.

“For a company who's saying nothing about their social and environmental impacts — when they're in an industry with obvious social and environmental impacts — then advocates, investors, customers and competitors start to say: What is this company doing and why aren't they doing anything?” he said.

To do the complicated reporting work, a whole new brand of employee has arisen: “Sustainability coordinators” who in turn form “green teams” or “corporate

environmental councils.”

The first class of “Sustainability MBAs” graduated from business schools across the country this year, according to the Sustainable Industries Journal. The UO’s Portland-based Sustainability Leadership Program for top and midlevel managers has certified nine private and public employees as sustainability leaders — and 18 more are in the pipeline.

And Good Company provides the instructors for the new professionals in the UO leadership program. “There’s some kind of fundamental change happening in the guts of our society and our economy. That’s where much of our work is,” Skov said.

Positioning Good Company

Good Company was launched by two men named Joshua, who were each born in 1969, and a cousin who later moved on to a wind power generating firm.

Joshua Proudfoot is tall and stately, a nationally competitive oarsman, with a degree in psychology from Clark Honors College.

Joshua Skov is short, holder of a pair of master’s degrees — including one in economics — and an undergraduate degree from Yale. He has a penchant for quoting Winston Churchill.

The pair built wide-ranging expertise in areas that include environmental toxics, energy creation, supply chain sources and impacts, global warming and endurance of materials.

“It’s not only that they really know a lot about what’s actually going on; their style is down-to-earth, and people respond to them very, very well,” said Ruta Stabina, who hires both Joshuas to teach in the UO’s Sustainability Leadership Program.

The city of Eugene purchasing department, which hired Good Company — for \$17,539, to date — to help write a sustainable purchasing policy, likes them too. “They’re very friendly and technical, too, and that’s a good combination,” said purchasing analyst Mia Cariaga.

The Good Company’s end result is the difference between a true sustainability program with clear measurements, annual renewal and shared understanding throughout the organizations ... and a green fig leaf.

“A lot of reports just focus on the good stuff they’re doing,” Skov said. “The very best reports — certainly the ones that we have people prepare — have an element of humility and describe the things that the company hasn’t done but wants to do. That’s the bigger challenge. That’s what pushes you further and holds you

accountable with the stakeholders.”

The state-of-the art environmental standards are the Sustainability Reporting Guidelines published by the nonprofit Global Reporting Initiative, based in Amsterdam, Netherlands. The program includes a set of 79 indicators with rules for disclosure, thoroughness and third-party assurances.

Good Company uses the international guidelines but tailors them to each specific client. The Joshuas are quick to say, however, that producing the document is the least of what they do. “It’s not just about a technical solution handed down from on high,” Skov said. “It’s about changing people’s understanding of the issues, of the possibilities.”

From bridges to banks

Good Company has worked for 15 colleges and universities in seven states. Skov helps universities gather data on their environmental performance, produce cost-benefit analyses on potential changes and engage employees in sustainability training.

Good Company’s biggest single client, at the moment, is the Oregon Department of Transportation.

The company signed a contract in May 2006 to look at the department’s practices, write a strategic plan for sustainability and produce a performance measurement manual. The work was supposed to be done last December and the company would be paid up to \$41,165, according to state documents.

Today, Good Company is not anywhere near ready to write the manual because, Proudfoot said, the work was too complicated to do quickly. ODOT has extended the contract and the company is still working on the project.

Good Company also is subcontractor on 30 freeway bridge replacement projects across the state, including the new spans over the McKenzie River and the South Umpqua River.

Proudfoot consults with bridge builders such as Hamilton Construction on the amount of greenhouse gas that would be generated by various design alternatives, how the builders can reduce environmental harm and how the state can engage local environmental watchdogs.

Good Company’s private clients include the Louisiana-Pacific Corp, Willamette Graystone and Wells Fargo.

For the latter, Skov and a group of UO students analyzed offices in multiple buildings in San Francisco. The team looked at the computers, the paper, the

electricity, water, purchasing, cleaning chemicals and other systems. And they produced a set of indicators for Wells Fargo such as toxics reduced or energy saved.

It's the specifics that persuade, said Steve Ellis, vice president for Wells Fargo's San Francisco-based Wholesale Services Group.

He said he has to prove, at the end of the day, that the sustainability effort made a difference to the company — it saved money, it built corporate teamwork or it created invaluable goodwill toward the firm.

Business of the moment

Good Company's business reached a new peak in the past year with an increased workload from ODOT and other clients. Skov and Proudfoot hired three additional associates, making a work force of six.

In September, the firm bought a \$540,000 building at 65 Centennial Loop in partnership with David Parker, whose solar panel installation business, Advanced Energy Systems, is going gangbusters with projects across the state.

Skov and Proudfoot conduct UO Sustainability Leadership workshops for managers — with subjects such as “Carbon Footprints and Climate Risk: Tools for Business and Government” and “Power of Purchasing: Sustainable Procurement.”

The contacts they make with managers in their class provide a steady flow of customers.

That's because when managers learn how complicated the sustainability process is, they hire Good Company to consult. Success has come to Good Company, but the Joshuas say they aren't ready to rest.

“The needs of organizations on the cutting edge in any field change quickly,” Skov said. “We have to be nimble. I don't take any of it for granted.”

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