

Courageous Leadership for a New World



Your guide to re-energising
your business' sustainability
agenda



OPUS
energy

The rapid change

brought by this recent global pandemic triggered a kind of fight-or-flight response: from our governments, from all of us in our everyday lives, and in our roles as business leaders.

Like many business leaders, you've possibly made tough decisions that at other times you would have avoided altogether. Our research shows that 75% of small and medium business (SME) decision-makers believe COVID-19 has made them feel differently about how they run their business. Maybe you and your team have surprised yourself with your levels of resilience and speed of reaction, with the kind of decisive bravery that's required to start a business in the first place.

It's been tough, for everyone, but we hope that the same boldness can now be aimed at one of our greatest challenges – climate change. Collectively, small and medium-sized businesses make up the **UK's biggest employer** – and we won't achieve audacious climate goals without everyone's commitment to taking some bold steps.

Encouragingly,

our research suggests that most business leaders also believe that this courageous attitude must last longer than lockdown. Nearly two-thirds of SME leaders say that one thing the pandemic has shown them is that they need to be braver in pursuing sustainability for their business.

We know that stabilising your business is a priority right now, but it's also important to boldly set our sights on the other great challenge of our times. That's probably why 59% of SME decision-makers say the sustainability agenda for their business has increased since the pandemic.

If you agree, then here's some advice on how you summon – and preserve – the bravery that's needed for the longer road to sustainability.

Revision of your vision



Sustainability is a long-term goal, so there's a risk it's something that gets left until later, something that will be addressed once the immediate priorities are dealt with.

But the bolder, braver thing to do is hardwire-it into your long-term ambition for your business. Make sustainability integral to your business' sense of purpose. Some of the resolve, the courage to make tough choices, comes from not losing sight of where you're going.

It's idealistic, but it's also pragmatic. Not just because contributing to a sustainable future is a positive action, but also because **consumers increasingly expect and demand it**. In our own research, 62% of SME leaders believe the sustainability agenda for their customers will increase in the next 12 months.

Many businesses have never formally captured their vision. If this rings true, then this is a good time to do it.

How to create a vision statement

1 Start with your 'why'

The 'why' is your motivation, your sense of (higher) purpose. It's motivational for your team, and it's motivational to customers. As Simon Sinek says, 'people buy the why'. Think about [his simple 'Golden Circles' model to help](#) [18 min watch]. This 'why' – we suggest – is where your part of the sustainability agenda belongs.

2 Picture 'where' you want to be

All of the 'whens' and 'hows' will come later – first, shake off the more practical targets and imagine a new future for your business. At this stage, you don't have to commit to reducing plastic use by 75% - maybe you just know you want to be a business that contributes more than it consumes. Your vision is a guiding light for you and your team. And though we may never reach it, we can move purposefully towards it.

3 Make it personal

Large corporations have to work hard to stay 'human'. One of the benefits of a smaller business is that it can feel much more personal. Choose the part of the sustainability agenda which to you, personally, feels like the greatest commitment. It could be the energy you use, the waste you (don't) produce, the way you source, the products you make.

4 Make it visible

Following the above, this purposeful, personal picture should become a mantra, something you – and the rest of your team – don't lose sight of. Make it something you're proud to stand beside and something you and your team live-up to.

5 Borrow some inspiration


Look at some ideas from the big brands, who have spent time in workshops and paid for consultants to help them craft their vision, and use those to build your own. Here's a couple for starters:

Tesla: To accelerate the world's transition to sustainable energy.

Patagonia: Build the best product, cause no unnecessary harm, use business to inspire and implement solutions to the environmental crisis.

IKEA: To create a better everyday life for the many people

Confront your fears



Setting a new course towards your vision will mean change, choices, and probably some tough decisions. The good news is, if you're running a business, you're already well-informed, so take some strength from that.

Still, we all need some encouragement once in a while, so here are a few ideas:

4 ways to conquer your doubts

1 Reinforce your support network.

It helps to have peers – outside of your own business – to share your challenges with, to bounce ideas off, or just as a sympathetic group where you can let off steam. It might be a local business network, an industry body with a focus on sustainability, or you might consider becoming a **B Corp**. Businesses large and small are finding their principles – and their network – a way to strengthen their progress towards sustainability. B Corps use profits and growth as a means to a greater end: positive impact for their employees, communities and the environment.

2 Design some quick victories.

Sustainability needs a vision, but it also needs a 'progress-bar', a shared sense of achievement. Annual targets can drift, and monthly targets can be too snack-sized. Consider quarterly goals for you and your team, to create a meaningful sense of momentum that you can all move purposefully towards.

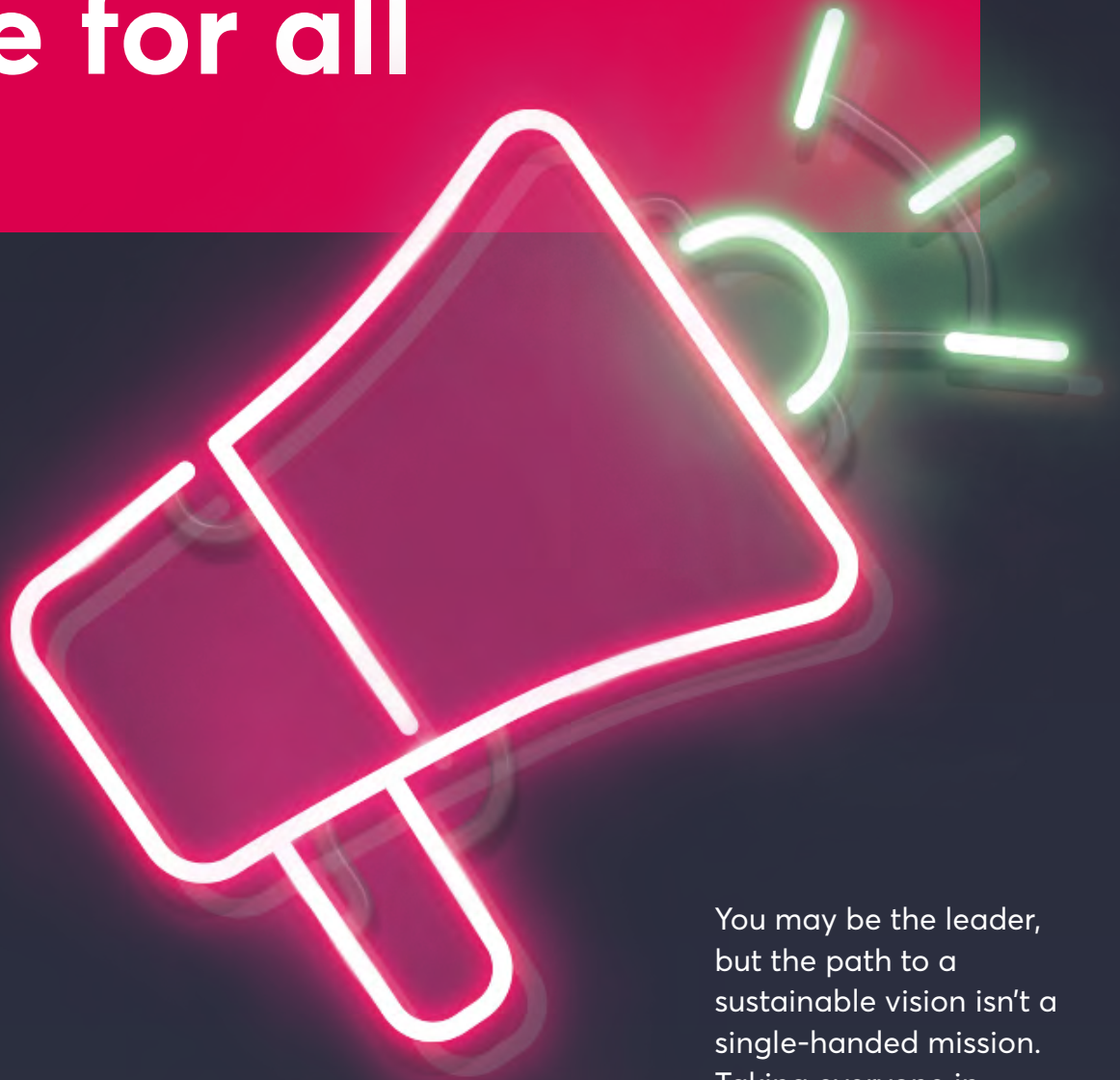
3 Avoid analysis paralysis.

It's tempting, when we have so much information just a Google search away, to tread water and keep seeking more knowledge. Set some decision parameters, for what you need to know (now) and what you'd like to know (in the future). If the information you have now is enough, take a deep breath - it's time to move forward.

4 Stairs, not mountains.

Don't look at decisions as one-time, momentous things. Break them down into smaller, less daunting 'stairs' and each step will create its own momentum.

All for one, one for all



You may be the leader, but the path to a sustainable vision isn't a single-handed mission. Taking everyone in your business with you, creating a sense of shared purpose, is critical to success.

3 steps on leading change

1 Find the change agents.

Some people are naturally more influential and persuasive, often in informal ways that lie outside of the formal hierarchy, and some of them will feel personally more passionate about sustainability in your business. Set aside the org-chart and look for who's most excited and energetic, and make them your change agents.

2 Form a Sustainability Task Force.

Bring your agents together, give them ownership of those quarterly goals, invite their ideas, and give them authority to lead change on your behalf. Whether it's creating policies, finding new suppliers, **exploring ways to generate your own renewable power**, or reducing office waste. Empower them and watch them flourish in the shared challenge.

3 Communicate, Communicate, Communicate.

Repeat your vision, and your shared progress, regularly. Saying something once is never enough, and it will seem throwaway and insincere. Just like the efforts to phase out single-use plastics, disposable leadership pronouncements should become a thing of the past. Repetition isn't just about getting people to understand, it's to build a growing sense of determination that becomes infectious. When you're a little bit tired of hearing it yourself – keep going.

Operation Dynamo for Net Zero



80 years ago, hundreds of 'Little Ships' rescued troops from the beaches of Dunkirk. Individually, they were small boats; too small to make a difference on their own. But in Operation Dynamo, each one joined many others to form a flotilla, and the collective effort far outweighed the sum of their parts.

By 2050 the UK has committed to a bold rescue plan again, this time to save our planet and future generations from carbon emissions. To get to net zero it will need the brave leadership of our small and medium business leaders, who together add up to the biggest part of our economy, if we are all to succeed.

Opus Energy is the UK's fifth-biggest business energy supplier, supplying electricity and gas to more than 350,000 business locations across the UK. It employs over 900 people between Northampton, Oxford and Cardiff.

Sourcing 100% of its electricity from renewable sources last year and purchasing power from over 2,300 renewable generators in the UK, Opus Energy is part of Drax Group and is committed to delivering a low-cost, zero-carbon energy future.

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Our planet.
It's all of our
business

