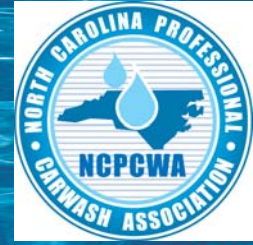
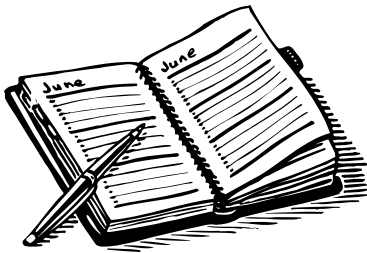


# NC Professional Carwash Association



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7300 Glenwood Ave.  
Raleigh, NC 27612



## Save the Dates!

The **Annual Meeting** for the NC Professional Carwash Association is **March 30, 2011**, at the Deep River Sporting Clays, 284 Cletus Hall Road, Sanford, NC. Lunch will be furnished at Noon followed by a few round table discussions. The clay shoot will begin at 2:30 p.m. At the meeting, we will also elect new Board Members and Association Officers. Reservation and Nomination details have been mailed out to members. If you did not receive one, email or call Sue at [sshearin@ncpcm.org](mailto:sshearin@ncpcm.org) or 919-782-4411.

Carwash owners and operators are also invited to attend the **Southeast Petro Food Marketing Expo** at the Myrtle Beach Convention Center **March 2 – 3, 2011**. This event is free and has lots of carwashes and carwash supplies. Learn more at the website [www.sepetro.org](http://www.sepetro.org). Below is a list of a few exhibitors that might be of special interest:

Washworld, Inc.  
Vehicle Wash Systems  
Unitec Electronics  
Sonny's Enterprises  
Shannon & Associates  
RDM Electronics  
OPW  
Mark II Equipment  
Madison Industries, Inc.  
Lustra Car Care Products  
Howco, Inc.

Hill & Foss/Tarheel Wash Systems  
Fidelity Bank  
D&S Car Wash Equipment Co.  
Carolina Pride Car Wash  
Carolina Induction Lighting/  
Lightoutservices  
Car Wash Concepts, Inc.  
Belanger, Inc.  
AUTEK, Inc.  
American Equipment Finance

## Own a Business? Six New Tax Breaks.....

Doing your taxes stinks, right? No fun at all. But take note as you brace for your 2010 return: A handful of changes in the tax code could translate into a fatter refund check.

The Small Business Jobs Act, passed last September, and the historic health care reform law, passed in March, enacted hefty credits and deductions for capital investments and employee health insurance costs.

Here is a rundown of six new credits and deductions likely to affect the most small business owners.

**1. Health care tax credit: Small businesses that pay at least half of their employee's health coverage can get a significant tax refund.**

The maximum credit goes to businesses with 10 or fewer full-time employees with annual wages that average \$25,000 or less. The break phases out for firms with 25 employees or that pay average wages above \$50,000. For 2010 through 2013, the tax credit covers up to 35% of the money that a qualifying business spends on its health insurance premiums. In 2014, the top tax credit bumps up to 50%. Tax-exempt organizations can claim 25% in the first time period and 35% after that. The credit is available for a maximum of six years: 2010 through 2013 and for any two years after that.

**2. Health insurance deduction for self employed: Are you your own boss and paying for your own health insurance?**

Normally, you can deduct your insurance costs from your business profits, but you can't deduct those costs from your self-employment taxes. But in 2010, the self-employed can deduct their health insurance costs from their business profits for both taxes. Let's say Sally, an architect, makes \$50,000 in net income and pays \$6,000 for health insurance. In other tax years, Sally would pay income tax on \$44,000 and self employment tax on \$50,000, explained Karen Brosi, a federally licensed tax professional based in Palo Alto, Calif. But in 2010, Sally will pay income tax and self employment taxes on \$44,000.

**3. Super-charged 'Section 179' provision:**

OK, this one is a little wonky. But it's worth knowing about. The extension of "Section 179" of the tax code allows businesses to write off the full amount of qualifying equipment or computer software made in 2010 or 2011, up to \$500,000 per

business, per year. What qualifies? Think tractors, robots and equipment. New and used items are eligible but, sorry, buildings aren't. Instead of having to deduct your capital expenditures slowly, the temporary change to Section 179 allows businesses to get more cash up front. Section 179 is specifically targeted to help small business: A business that spends more than \$2 million in one year on qualifying capital will not be able to get the full benefit of the Section 179 write-off. You can only take advantage of the full Section 179 write-off if your small business booked a profit. A Section 179 write-off can not cause your business to "make or increase a loss" for the year, explained Brosi.

#### **4. Bonus depreciation extension:**

For 2010, there is an accelerated depreciation schedule: The point is to get cash into the hands of small businesses quickly. Unlike Section 179, you can depreciate items even if your business is in the red for the year.

Bonus depreciation covers new equipment only, and can be taken in addition to a Section 179 write-off, if the item is eligible for both benefits. You can depreciate "tangible property," like buildings, machinery, vehicles, furniture, and equipment, as well as "intangible property," such as patents, copyrights and computer software. (Sorry, if you bought a plot of land, that doesn't qualify.) Businesses that bought a qualifying item after Sept. 8 can claim 100% of its cost (so long as it is used before Jan. 1, 2012). Businesses that bought such items before Sept. 8 can claim 50% (so long as it is put into service before Jan. 1, 2013).

#### **5. Depreciation on a business car or truck:**

Did you buy a new car, van or truck for your business last year? Ka-ching!

For 2010, business owners who buy and use a brand new passenger vehicle will depreciate much more than usual -- \$11,060 for a car, and \$11,160 for a light duty truck or van. That includes an extra \$8,000 bonus depreciation, on top of the usual first-year depreciation. If you buy an SUV or heavy pickup, the rules are slightly different, said Brosi.

#### **6. General Business Credit:**

If you are one of those unlucky business owners affected by the Alternative Minimum Tax, you might get a little break in 2010. Boiled down, if you have to calculate your taxes under both the regular tax structure and under the AMT, you pay Uncle Sam whichever one is more. If your taxes calculated normally are \$10,000 and \$12,000 under the AMT, you owe \$12,000. Usually, general business credits do not apply toward the AMT calculation. But for 2010, deductions included in the "General Business Credit" part of the tax code are also allowable under the AMT. Applying these credits to your AMT will reduce what you owe under the AMT, explained Brosi. There are a couple dozen credits in this category: Some that might impact small biz include a benefit for hiring someone unemployed, the costs for starting up an employer pension plan or the costs of employer-provided child care services.

## **Eyes on the Money.....**

The number one thing thieves look for when targeting a carwash, according to Thomas McLain of A-OK Equipment and Supply Co., Inc., is its location. They're looking to see if "it is out of a busy area, or whether it doesn't have an attendant working, as well as how well lit it is at night," said McLain.

McLain knows about safety and security because he not only owns a six-bay self-serve carwash, but he has also worked at A-OK, which manufactures self-serve and in-bay automatic carwash equipment, since he was a teenager. McLain is now the vice president of Minneapolis-based A-OK, which was founded by his father Douglas in 1979.

#### **Keep money offsite**

When talking safety, McLain said it's important to know your surroundings, know your employees and to not, under any circumstances, keep money on the premises. "Money should never, ever be kept onsite," McLain emphasized. "A good operator will tell you that he or she will remove the cash every day. If you do not remove the cash on a daily basis you are asking for trouble either from an employee or from an outside thief." He also said that it is important to change up your daily routine, because a good thief will usually stake out a place as well as the owner/operator to learn their schedule and become familiar with their operations.

"The owner should not keep the same routine for their daily removal of the days' receipts," he said. "A good thief will watch the carwash and figure out the routine of the owner/operator, making him or her vulnerable to theft when they are taking the cash from the ACW or the coin/bay meter box."

Also, a carwash that is open 24 hours a day should have a good camera system that is able to read license plates, McLain explained, and the cameras should be hidden or out of reach to the public so they can't be disabled or stolen.

#### **Be sure to really know your employees**

It's unfortunate, but owners and operators need to be aware of and yes, even skeptical, of their employees, no matter how nice they are or how hard they work. "The first problem in security is in the owner's labor force," said McLain. "Most owners had good intentions when they hired an attendant or manager, however with all the cash that is at hand, the urge to pocket a few quarters here or there becomes overwhelming and the employee may think that the carwash owner will not miss a few dollars." McLain said it can go on for a long time, where an employee will take a little at a time and go unnoticed. "Most times the owner will not notice the pinching until it has gone on for some time," McLain explained.



To avoid being taken advantage of, owners need to be more hands-on with their carwash to get a feel for what the daily take should be and see if it fluctuates from that point, McLain suggested. "Owners need to really take good inventory of their cash intake," to prevent employees from having the opportunity to steal.

#### **Money drawers and floor safes**

Money should always be kept in a money drawer or floor safe, even it is not a large amount, and cash register drawers should have only a little amount so that change can be made — but that's all. They should not be used for storing money, McLain cautioned, and only the owner and/or operator should have the keys and the codes.

"The owner should always keep track of the keys that access the money and only the owner or operator should be allowed to hold said keys," McLain said. "This is tough to do since most carwash owners have another job and have to rely on an attendant to make change or refund cash; in this case the owner should have a method that will tell them that the attendant was in the cash area of the carwash."

A camera watching the cash is a good idea, too. To boost security at your site, have a camera installed where the cash is, "and also have a way that the key is checked in or out," McLain suggested.

#### **But what if a thief steals the safe?**

It could happen, but it's unlikely that a thief could take off with an entire floor safe, according to McLain. "Carwashes normally have a floor-based safe. These are mudded in the wall with cement and secured with some type of security device in the wall so they can't be torn out, however it does not stop a thief from trying," McLain said. With enough power and know-how it could be done, but it would take a lot of effort, and with security cameras in place, chances are they will either be deterred or caught.

To be safe you should make sure you clear out the cash on a daily basis, McLain said, and if in the chance a thief does get in the safe, the day's money may be gone, but that's it. And the thief, hopefully, will not be back.

## **Revenues Up, Costs Down.....**

Keeping revenue up and costs down is the ultimate million dollar question. Is there a secret formula? Is it magic? Is it just luck? How is it some businesses stick around for decades while others can't even make it to the five-month mark? Think about it, for every McDonald's that pops up, a Krispy Kreme is going down. And carwashes are no different.

It's not just about reducing expenses either. Steve Robinson, marketing director of Mark VII Equipment Inc, said operators need to also identify the ways they can improve their bottom line. "Focusing only on reducing costs can lead you to make decisions that are penny wise and pound foolish," he explained.

#### **Consider retrofitting before replacement**

It's happening with cars and homes and should be happening at carwashes, too. Everything is being enhanced, expanded and retrofitted, instead of being replaced. It's a nice way of saving money, down time and the environment to boot. To put it bluntly: Don't buy new unless you have to. Ryan Carlson, director of marketing for WashCard Systems, said he firmly believes there is a very strong retrofit market for existing equipment. "There is less waste and there is the opportunity to take advantage of working equipment," he suggested. "If you have a piece of equipment that has some life left in it, but you need more features, retrofit it, and do not replace it." Enhancements, such as adding a credit card feature to an entry station, instead of replacing an entire station is wise, according to Carlson. You might also consider new self-serve services, like an in-bay dryer or foam application, to boost revenues through increased time in the bay.

However, there may come a time when the equipment is simply not worth saving. Robinson said that if equipment is over five years old, it might be time to invest in overdue equipment upgrades. Seasoned carwash operators, according to Robinson, know that the older the equipment, the more it costs to maintain and the less effective it is at delivering a clean car to the customer.

"It's easy to rationalize that you're saving money by delaying an equipment upgrade, but new equipment is more reliable, costs less to operate and maintain, reduces energy consumption, delivers better quality results, and offers new features that can increase your average revenue per customer."

#### **Consider how you use your labor**

There is probably nothing more irritating for a business owner than watching an employee sit around on the clock. But just because the weather is preventing a high-volume day doesn't mean you can't task your employees with jobs around the site. As Carlson likes to put it, "Turn your rainy days into pay days."

A suggestion from Robinson is to pick a slow month to perform an audit on your entire operation and ask yourself what you would do different if you were starting over again. Be sure to look at how the employees are being used. This can be as magnanimous as switching from a four bay self-serve to a 2/2 with automatics or a less complex overhaul that simply involves investing in new equipment that automates tasks that are currently done manually.

Carlson breaks it down even more and suggests finding ways to use employees beyond the meet and greet and bay cleanings. "I don't think it has to do with having too much staff, I think they are not utilizing the staff that they have. I don't believe



that enough businesses have put in the right bullet points into the employees job descriptions.”

Employees should also be used as the faces of the business and should help with the marketing of the carwash and promotional events, Carlson added. “For a rainy day,” he suggested, “what if it said in their job description they could help with a mailing list or help create an e-mail blast, or stuff envelopes with a mailer? There should always be a Plan B, rather than let an employee sit outside of a bay when the weather is bad.”

#### **Out with the old-fashioned way**

According to Carlson, anywhere software can be implemented is a smart thing. “People who are doing their books and accounting by hand are crazy. It leads to madness,” he said, noting that most operators already have a computer. He suggested picking up a copy of the program QuickBooks or, make it even more simple and set up an accounting form using Excel. “Why do the math when something that never messes up will do it for you?” he asked.

Reviewing new technologies is worth the time, according to Robinson who suggested considering new business models and practices. This is not the time to go with the tried and true because business ships are sinking and there needs to be some quick, inventive and new ways of thinking. Robinson also said to look at your competitors for new ideas.

Robinson said he has observed that companies that weather business downturns the best are the ones that balance their cost cutting with an increased focus on sales and marketing. “It’s a lot more fun being the guy that figures out to increase his car counts when all the competitors can do is bemoan how theirs are dropping.”

He suggested trying new marketing tactics such as:

- Refreshing signage;
- Implementing a loyalty card; and/or
- Creating a fleet program.

“There are tons of great ideas published regularly in the trade press. And keep that old adage in mind: When the going gets tough...the tough get going.”

#### **Save energy and save money**

Going green is nice and all for the environment, but it also saves energy and money. Wasting energy is a lose-lose situation and controlling the amount of energy used is win-win.

Robinson pointed out that energy savings can be achieved in smaller increments, such as replacing your lighting system, adding a reclaim system, or installing solar panels. He suggested operators move in small steps and choose just one of those initiatives each year to incrementally reduce costs and make their business greener.

Other small steps that can help save money:

- Keep the lights off when they’re not being used;
- Turn off the television in a waiting area if no one is in there;
- Fix leaky toilets; and
- Use scrap paper as much as possible.

Carlson said that some may consider it as being environmentally-friendly, while others look at it as being economical. Not only will those little acts save money, but they might draw in the Earth-minded customers who don’t like the energy-wasters down the street.

“At the end of the day,” Carlson said, “we call it being green, while others call it being thrifty. So, reducing the amount of resources used in our business is nothing new, we’re just changing the way we market it.” He said that a carwash needs to adapt to what the customers are looking for, even if being eco-friendly seems like a big undertaking.

“There are too many carwash owners who rely on ‘well that’s the way it’s always been done,’ and that’s a poor way of thinking about it because unfortunately their customers have changed and those who haven’t are no longer with us.”

## **Excellent Customer Service Starts with Your Employees .....**

### **Follow these 11 steps to teach your staff the value of a positive carwash experience.**

Whether prepping or drying a car, answering the phone, fixing a problem, selling a retail product or reconciling an unpaid invoice, the quality of the interaction between one human being and another is what will be judged by the customer to determine how much you care about them and their business.

If the state of your relationship skills (and those of your staff) do not equal or exceed your sales and marketing skills, your “lifetime value” relationship with your customer is in danger. The “customer experience” is the sum total of the feelings you evoke as a result of any interaction that takes place at any touch point in your organization. Anywhere along the line, and yes, even in the tunnel, a customer can experience a moment of truth where they have the opportunity to make a judgment about the quality of the service you are delivering.

As a manager you should know that survey after survey reports that people prefer to do business with a positive, upbeat person. As a customer, you instinctively know that people want to do business with people who enjoy what they are doing, are having a good time doing it and genuinely care about being able to help you solve your problem, or achieve your goals. So, here are some tips on creating a more positive, up-beat, can-do workforce.



**1. Remember, the best teacher is a good example.** First examine your own behavior. Are you talking the positive talk or are you mumbling beneath your breath “three more days ‘til Friday.” Take great care to listen to your own language. Do you frame things in the positive, or do you often start your sentences with “No.” Do you say “Yes, but..” negating the first half of your sentence with your last? If so, purchase a copy of “Learned Optimism” by Martin Seligman for your corporate library and inhale it. Then pass it on.

Optimistic people adapt easier to change, are more creative, have more fun and are healthier than pessimistic ones. Think about it, looking for innovation? Think optimism, that’s one way to get there.

**2. Learn (and teach) the power of positive self-talk.** Often our internal chatter is negative. Reprogram your own chatter first and then listen carefully for signs of it in others. When you hear someone saying “boy am I stupid” gently coach them away from that attitude by replying with “don’t be so hard on yourself, you’re not stupid. You may have made a bad decision, we all do, from time to time. Let’s talk about that, what you’ve learned, and how to avoid it in the future.”

Our body responds to our self-talk, if we tell ourselves we are disorganized, we behave just that way. Tell yourself, with conviction, you are an organized person, and the behavior will begin to change. Our brain responds literally, like our computers. Learn to replace negative programming with positive.

**3. Ban whining.** One whiner in the group can bring everyone down. A whiner is like an infection — it spreads. Put one strong whiner in a room and they can turn it into a pity party. Stop it at the source. Learn to spot them during the interview process. Don’t hire them in the first place, unless you are prepared to keep vigilance over their behavior and attempt to change it. Good luck. Whiners love whining. Put a “No whining” sign on your office door.

**4. Teach the art of “win/win.”** In our competitive society we have a win/lose mentality. It may be a good strategy to fill a sports stadium, but is a good way to run a company. Help people to understand that thinking “win/win” opens up the possibility for new solutions.. Remember, in the 21st century, it’s innovation and creativity that will give us the edge, innovation comes from open minds and “possibility thinking.”

**5. Dump the drama.** Melodrama sells tabloids, and gets people to watch shows like Fear Factor but it’s something you don’t need in your company. It saps valuable creative energy. If you’ve been using “crisis management” as your modus operandi, get out of the office, read a few good books, (like Steven Covey’s), benchmark yourself with “new thinkers,” and learn a new style. Crisis management is passé, wasteful and destructive.

**6. Learn, teach and reward stress management techniques.** A Harris poll says that 90 percent of all Americans live in a state of chronic stress. YIKES!!!! No wonder customers get treated so poorly. Make sure people understand the role they play in controlling their own stress. We don’t have control over every circumstance; we do have control of how we perceive them. Take a deep breath, count to 10, walk away (physically or mentally) when you have to and call a “time-out.” Short circuit stress on the way in. Learn it and teach it. Reinforce it. “Bob, I noticed how well you reacted with that angry customer yesterday, I was glad to see you take a deep breath and not react defensively — good job — you saved a valuable customer, and your own health as well. I’m proud to have you on the team.”

**7. Encourage people to live in the “now.”** Dwell on the past only long enough to figure out what you want to learn from it, then move on. Stop talking about “the good old days.” What is important is what is going on right now. Give your fullest attention to exactly what you are doing now. Do it well, do it right and enjoy it. Customers can always tell if you are giving them your undivided attention, and they really appreciate it.

**8. Start a list.** Title it “The 10 Best Things about Working Here.” Let people add to it and watch it grow. It’s fun, positive and a great way to focus on what’s right with your business. After the list is finished start one called “Ten More.” Remember you get more of what you focus on.

**9. Get psyched!** Recognize that almost 80 percent of what the average person takes in is negative. You’ve got a job to do. Create a positive sanctuary in your workplace. Develop a corporate library that includes all kinds of motivational literature, audio and videotapes. Play audio tapes and video tapes in lunch rooms, keep inspirational books around and start discussion groups. Create positive energy; people inside and outside the company will feel it and want to come back for more.

**10. Don’t worry, be happy.** Playing upbeat music helps lift your spirits. Challenge the staff to develop the “happiest” of happy music tapes, a collection of tunes that will keep people smiling and whistling while they work. (They make great coming to and going home from tapes too).

**11. Smile.** When you activate the smiling muscles in your face, you activate the “happy” brain chemicals that help you feel good. You can’t be depressed when you are smiling, and smiles are contagious. So, smile.

As a manager, as a leader, it’s your responsibility to help to create an experience for your customer that has the word “value” written all over it. Customers respond better to a company that provides them with a quality product at a fair price when it’s served up by positive, upbeat, can-do people. Really, who wants to do business with a grump?

## Empowering Employees.....

**Q:** I find some recommendations rather unrealistic, especially for businesses just starting up. For example, I would like to keep my employees happy and having fun, but find it a great challenge due to limited resources. I am not able to pay my



employees well, nor provide a good working environment. My priority right now is to make more money and turn this business into a reality. On the other hand, my employees want good salaries and to work in a slick environment. We have conflicting priorities, therefore I am forced to micromanage my staff to get results. Please advise what I should do to make my employees happy.

**A:** This is a challenging dilemma for entrepreneurs: During a business's precarious launch stage, can one afford to be generous, foster a fun and caring atmosphere, and give employees freedom? It is not only realistic, but vital to your business's long-term success.

During our early days at Student magazine, I did not have much money to pay my staff or improve our premises. We worked in a basement flat, with a few beanbag chairs, some desks and phones. But the thrill and promise of possible success united us and we all worked long hours in those cramped conditions. No one complained -- everyone was intent on making the magazine work.

The same was true of our first Virgin companies -- a mail-order business selling records, and later, a few record stores. Again, we tried to keep the vibe relaxed, maintaining small, friendly offices. This decision paid off, attracting great team members who were drawn by the flexible working conditions and lively industry.

We always strove to create an atmosphere of team spirit and mutual appreciation. At Student, we had a party or at least a few drinks whenever a staffer brought in an important advertising account, and we celebrated the publication of every edition. We tried to make sure everyone had a great time at work, which generated great loyalty.

My philosophy has not changed: Do something you enjoy and your enthusiasm will rub off on others, ensuring a committed and spirited team. For more than 40 years, I have felt that one of my most important jobs is to attract and motivate great people who genuinely feel their job is more important than just money.

Emily talks about having to micromanage her team. I find this counterproductive: Employees will not take responsibility for their actions if the boss is looking over their shoulders all the time. They will not take the initiative to work that extra hour, make that extra call or squeeze that little bit more out of a negotiation.

The credit for Virgin's enduring and varied success is often attributed to me, but it's actually due to the people who piloted those businesses. My decision to give them autonomy and encourage them to take risks has allowed us to grow while keeping costs down.

Giving my employees room to work has often meant my moving out of the business's headquarters. In the early days I used a houseboat as my office, and later my home in Holland Park, to give my managers the space and authority to make their own decisions.

When things do go wrong, you must teach yourself to listen to your employees and encourage them to find solutions. If you are worried by the business's finances, share this with your team and then listen to their suggestions. Your employees should never feel like hired hands, but your fellow entrepreneurs.

Finally, it sounds as though some employees are not working out at Emily's business. If you are in this situation, take a long, hard look at yourself and how you treat your employees. Then look at your senior team (rot starts at the top), and whether direction is being effectively delivered. Letting people go should be your very last lever.

Managers should never rule by fear. I find enthusiasm, genuine openness and camaraderie with your people are far better. Successful entrepreneurs usually have excellent people skills that exponentially increase their ability to make things happen. So remember: encourage, enthuse, and try to make work fun.



## The Many Payoffs of Green Business.....

A communications expert for an energy efficiency nonprofit says he gets a lot of questions about payback: How long will it take for this or that energy upgrade to pay for itself through energy cost savings? This is an important question for any business trying to be fiscally responsible in this shaky economy.

But the straightforward financial return on investment of sustainability measures is only part of the reason businesses should be committed to reducing their environmental footprints today. There are a host of compelling long-term benefits that businesses reap once they embark on sustainability initiatives -- and many of these benefits are ones they often didn't initially bank on.

Here's a look at four "fringe benefits" of green business:

### **1. Opportunities for great publicity.**

Face it: As "green business" becomes more ingrained and trumpeted in the business world, more bloggers and mainstream media are covering it and looking to feature real-world examples. Companies that take on ambitious sustainability endeavors -- whether it's going "carbon neutral" or starting an ambitious recycling initiative -- can earn positive PR. Green start-ups also generate great coverage. On the flipside, all this coverage of green practices today also means companies that ignore their environmental impact or engage in "greenwashing" are more likely to attract bad publicity.

### **2. Better employee engagement.**

Young adults today are paying more attention to the social and environmental responsibility of their employers or prospective employers. It's cool to work for a company trying to change the world. Green practices are a way to engage employees in a good cause and help them feel more connected to the business. Read this recent blog post by Taiga Company, a green



business consultant, on how to bolster employee engagement by tying it to the company’s energy efficiency initiatives.

**3. Healthier, more comfortable workplaces.**

Reducing a company’s carbon footprint often goes hand-in-hand with improving the workplace environment. New high-efficiency furnaces, for instance, burn cleaner than older inefficient ones. Replacing gas-guzzling SUVs with a fleet of hybrid vehicles exposes your employees to less carbon emissions on a daily basis. Using less-toxic materials in your products means everyone will be healthier.

**4. Time saved in the long run.**

Sure, putting together a full-blown sustainability plan – as I recommend businesses do – and putting together the research to do it takes time, commitment, money and thought. But once those plans reach fruition, the outcomes often save the company time. New equipment requires less maintenance than older equipment. Less waste means less time collecting and hauling it away.

**Five Green Business Trends.....**

It’s wasn’t so easy being “green” when the economy was blue. But as the U.S. economy looks brighter in 2011 – as most hope and expect it will – businesses will be more focused on long-term sustainability. A key part of that is environmental sustainability. Environmentally responsible business practices are quickly becoming a top priority for many businesses, as more realize the financial benefits and competitive advantages that come with it. But being a “green business” now and in the future will demand even more transparency over green practices and less tolerance for fuzzy green marketing.

Here’s a look at some green business trends to expect in 2011:

**1. Charting progress and success.** Many big corporations like Microsoft and Walmart are creating teams of employees focused exclusively on environmental sustainability and have executives to oversee those teams. This will undoubtedly raise the bar for every company, large and small. More businesses will weave environmental sustainability into their business plans and budgets, writing full-blown sustainability plans and benchmarking their progress. Don’t be surprised to see more businesses devoting sections of their Web sites to describing their carbon- and resource-saving initiatives.

**2. Eco-managing the supply chain.**

It’s easy to unravel a company’s green image if consumers find out its products are sourced in environmentally unfriendly ways. So companies will continue to dig deeper into the green practices of their suppliers and hold them to higher standards, such as creating supplier scorecards.

**3. LEDs get more play.**

As the New York Times reported last summer, some LED (light-emitting diodes) light bulbs’ prices dropped to less than \$20 in 2010, and prices are expected to drop substantially over the next few years. With lighting one of the biggest energy costs for so many businesses, a growing number of them are likely to start replacing older, less-efficient lights with LEDs, which use at least 75 percent less energy than incandescent and even less than compact fluorescent lights (CFLs). Moreover, many utilities are introducing rebates to make the upfront costs of LED lighting more palatable.

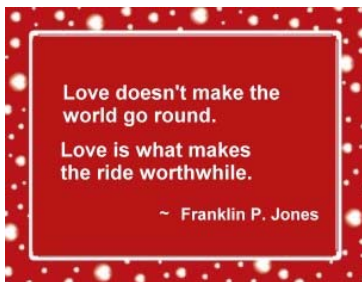
**4. Greater employee engagement.**

More companies are realizing they need their employees’ help identifying ways to reduce their environmental footprint. As a result, they will be communicating with employees more frequently about their green practices and soliciting new ideas, using green teams and other engagement techniques.

**5. Smarter green marketing.**

Companies are also getting savvier about communicating their environmental sustainability initiatives with their customers and the public. More will be engaging their customers in the conversation in creative ways, launching public awareness campaigns about green issues connected to their business and helping their customers see why their green practices make a difference. Don’t be surprised to see more businesses devoting sections of their websites to describing their carbon- and resource-saving initiatives.

What will you be doing different with your green practices in 2011?



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