

Sustainability

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Dick Roy and Jeanne Roy

*Co-Directors of the
Center for Earth Leadership in
Portland, Oregon*

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The Sustainability Professional

On the Record with Dick Roy and Jeanne Roy,
Co-Directors of the Center for Earth Leadership in Portland, Oregon



The Center for Earth Leadership

Co-founded by Dick Roy and Jeanne Roy, the Center for Earth Leadership trains and motivates local residents of the Northwest to assume a leadership role in forging a sustainable culture.

A singular vision guides the Center: Citizens must provide the true leadership for a sustainable future. Center programs recognize the immense potential of each individual to assume an expanded leadership role in daily life by reducing one's personal impact on the earth, being an agent of change, and being an assertive advocate for the Earth.

The Center pursues a three-pronged strategy:

- Classes and workshops to train citizens who want to take on leadership roles in the sustainability movement
- Projects to raise visibility within disciplines and populations to move the Northwest along the path of sustainability
- Publications to provide essential knowledge for citizen-leaders

Dick Roy and Jeanne Roy are widely recognized sustainability proponents out of Portland, Oregon. Through discussion group sessions, the Roys teach local citizenry how to influence their peers, with the goal of creating wider and wider circles of influence for the environmental movement. They look to transform the fundamental culture of the region and, in doing so, become a model and source of inspiration for other areas. Sustainability: The Journal of Record editor Jamie Devereaux speaks to the Roys about influencing change and how their goal—enabling a minority of highly motivated citizens in the Northwest to be the leaders in achieving a sustainable future—became their credo.

Sustainability: The Journal of Record (SJoR): It is not often you see a couple devote themselves full-time to the cause of sustainability, as you both do, but to start, how did you come to be involved in the movement?

Jeanne Roy: For me, the impetus was around 1970, when I first saw a photograph of the Earth from space. It changed my perception of our relationship to the Earth, and I realized how fragile the Earth could be—a thin layer of soil, atmosphere, and water supports all of life. So I became aware that everything I did had an impact on the Earth, and I wanted to lessen that impact.

My first foray into influencing policy around bettering the environment began with working on Portland's Clean Air Act. I represented the League of Women Voters on a state advisory committee and became a watchdog to see it implemented.

In the 1980s and '90s, I shifted my focus to recycling and composting and formed a nonprofit called Recycling Advocates. We were instrumental in getting curbside recycling in the state of Oregon. We developed a Master Recycler program that trained hundreds of adults to do education in the community. I also wrote a column in our newspaper, "Reduce, Raise, Recycle." So that was my involvement until Dick joined me later on.

Dick Roy: I might start with a conversation Jeanne and I had at the Oregon coast in 1991. I had worked up until this point as a corporate lawyer with businesses. Jeanne and I had both been involved in policy making. I was on the Oregon State Board of Forestry for eight years and the Water Policy Review Board for two, and she was an advisor to policy makers at all levels. When we were down at the coast thinking about how we might make our contribution, it was really a shake of the dice on working as directly as we could to change culture. The reason for that was we felt that without a culture change, society would always be at risk.

For example, one legislature might adopt a progressive public policy, and the next one might come along and take it away. If the culture were to change, then other things would follow. Businesses would follow, and certainly the right leaders would be elected.

So we have been trying to define the current edge of the sustainability movement and press ahead and work as directly as possible at changing culture. What that has meant is all of our programs, in a way, were facilitating the movement of others, and we are not on the front line of effecting the change ourselves. We are working with a goal of changing both individuals and circles of influence, with the thought that as those change, the broader culture will change.

SJoR: What is the Center for Earth Leadership and who is the target audience for this organization?

Dick Roy: Well, we had been working for many years on discussion courses and raising awareness on sustainability issues. And we found as we went along that once awareness was raised, a lot of people wanted to do something more.

We also found that, for the most part, people need structure. In 2006, when Al Gore was furthering awareness about climate change, we decided to develop a structure that would be helpful in creating local action by citizens. So the idea that we came up with was to start with a course called How to Be an

Agent of Change in Your Circle of Influence. It is a six-session course. There are five weekly meetings of about two hours each. Then we skip four weeks, and then there is a sixth meeting when the participants come back together to recap.

Now, the idea behind that is that each of us is a member of a lot of circles of influence, which is really any group that I am a member of. Some of the typical circles are workplaces, churches, neighborhoods, and schools. So the idea behind the course is that each participant takes a look at all the circles of influence that they are a part of. They select one circle, and then they develop a plan as to how that circle might become more sustainable. Then they take first steps in implementing that plan.

As an example of who we reach, with the help of one of our early agents of change, we created the Eco-School Network. It is now a very vital organization in Portland, and we have parents in 40 schools who are active agents of change. We also found that architects, because of their knowledge about sustainability and because they are project-oriented, are great agents of change.

SJoR: What characteristics make someone a good candidate for becoming an agent of change?

Jeanne Roy: Anyone can be a change agent, and our course, *How to Be an Agent of Change in a Circle of Influence* is open to anyone. So through our group process, people can end up feeling very confident about bringing about change in a small circle. We focus on small steps and small circles because that is where people can have the most influence.

However, there are some characteristics that are helpful for a change agent to have. Probably the most important one is passion. In other words, you have to have passion for a change that you would like to see, or have some vision about how your workplace or your neighborhood could be more sustainable.

Then, along with the passion needs to be the willingness to make a commitment or to take a first step, because a lot of people do have the passion, they have ideas of what change they would like to see, but somehow they just never get around to taking that first step. So that needs to be a part of it.

Then also helpful is a willingness to experiment and adapt. People need to be willing to jump in and try to bring about a change, and then if it does not work, to adapt and make needed shifts. Along that line, persistence is the key element for success. There will always be roadblocks—there will always be failures along the way. But if people are persistent, then often they are the most likely to succeed.

Another characteristic that we think is helpful is being able to connect with people. There are some individuals who achieve change on their own, but that is not very common. What we recommend in our class is that people form a core group. Find others in your organization who have common values and who are willing to help you. We help people with how to do that, how to invite others to be a part of your core group, and how to motivate them and keep them engaged over a period of time.

SJoR: In your recent TED talk you both discussed the idea of “hope” and the idea that “hope is essential.” Could you elaborate on this point? Also, could you discuss hope in relation to the reality of the times we live in—how does one balance hope with facing hard truths?

Dick Roy: It is a difficult thing because if you look at the bulk of what is going on with the Earth in today’s times, then at least for the foreseeable future, there is a huge amount of bad news ahead.

As Jeanne and I think about hope, we feel that hope is essential, and that the alternative would be hopelessness or fear—it would not be a place we would want to be. In search of this idea we looked to the book *Man’s Search for Meaning* by Viktor Frankl (Beacon Press, 1963). In that book, Frankl, who was a Jewish psychiatrist in a Nazi concentration camp, observed humans in the worst of circumstances. He felt those who would survive the atrocities in the healthiest way held out the hope that they would once again be with friends and they would once again have meaningful work. Even in the worst of circumstances you can have hope.

For us, we concluded that hope is our highest vision of the possible. This is important because my highest vision of the possible really cannot be taken away from me, and it is something I can hold under the worst of circumstances. I may have to change that over the course of time because my vision of the possible may change, but I can always hold out hope.

Then we also felt that one cannot have authentic hope and live in denial. In other words, to live in a fanciful world, even though you had some feeling and some level of hopefulness, was not ultimately productive or possible. So the idea behind it would be to embrace reality and try to understand reality as best we can and not let reality disempower us. It is then a very freeing thing.

So in our daily life what that means is to align our conduct with our highest vision and to embrace the reality of the world and not be disempowered by the news of the day.

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Our goal is always to change the culture of the organization so that it will be embedded and it will last—rather than just having one person make a change in a workplace or a school.

SJoR: What advice do you have for companies looking to expand their focus to cover the triple bottom line—people, planet, and profit? Could you give us some tangible changes they could make in the short term? In the longer term?

Jeanne Roy: Instead of just talking about the practices, I would like to mention some steps that we think are important. We actually developed 10 steps toward sustainability when we were operating the Natural Step network, because, as we have said, we believe in changing the culture. Our goal is always to change the culture of the organization so that it will be embedded and it will last—rather than just having one person make a change in a workplace or a school, for example. So I will just mention a few of the beginning steps that we think are important.

The first one would be to have the people in management make a commitment to sustainability in some way. Now, for example, one of our companies in the Natural Step started with getting approval at the board level that sustainability was an important issue for the company. In another company, a fairly small remodeling company, the managers attended an all-day training, and then after the training, they expressed their commitment. It is good if there is some sort of commitment up front at the highest levels.

Then the second step would be to actually develop a policy to implement sustainability practices and make that public. A lot of companies put it on their website. They may even put it in their entryway, on the wall. But what that does is energize all the employees of the company. There are usually people who have wanted to make changes, but they have not had the green light to go ahead and do that. So when a policy is established and is public, then that gives them the green light to move ahead on some things that they had wanted to do.

Another important step would be to designate one person to be in charge of the sustainability initiative. Sometimes companies choose a person who is already a member of the company and gives them that assignment in addition to their regular duties; or at other times they actually hire a sustainability coordinator. For example, Portland State University has a person in charge of sustainability, and a number of our government offices, universities, and businesses here in the Portland area do that.

Then fourth, we think that training all employees about sustainability is key if it is to be actually embedded into the culture. A number of the companies here arranged half-day or full-day trainings—or, like in the case of Nike, two-day trainings—for their

employees so that they understand what sustainability is, and then the employees start generating their own ideas of what changes can be made in their company.

An example of a company that has changed to be more sustainable is Hot Lips Pizza, which has a few restaurants here in Portland. It started with energy-saving measures, and it replaced all the lighting with more efficient lighting, and also more efficient appliances. By doing that, in a very short time, it cut its electric bill in half. Then the company also made the decision to purchase locally grown organic food and started finding suppliers in the area who could provide those. It reduced its disposables—instead of using paper plates, it chose to use straw trays with just a thin paper cover—and it began composting its food. Then in the longer term, the organization began switching its delivery trucks to hybrid vehicles. Another measure it took was to capture waste heat from the oven and use it to heat water.

We found that at first companies will take on the low-hanging fruit actions, and then later they will take measures where the payback period is a little bit longer.

SJoR: For individuals at organizations that are not necessarily at the management level, what can they do to spur change?

Jeanne Roy: We have found that the most common action to take is to form a green team. Sometimes this can happen without management support and the employees meet on their own time. But oftentimes it is better if they get management support and can meet on company time. But that is, I would say, the most common way to start an initiative, when you do not yet have the management taking the action.

SJoR: Do you have any advice for students looking to start a career in the field or gear their lifestyle more toward sustainability?

Dick Roy: Just in terms of moving ahead in life, one thing I would strongly recommend is that we all have total control over our passion, so we can direct our passion in any way we wish. I think, early on, it is helpful to just simply direct your passion to things that do not consume energy and resources, because I think that in the future ahead, we have to find satisfaction and fulfillment in life without wasting a lot of energy and consuming a lot of resources. I know from personal experience and from observing others that we really do have total control over how we direct our passion. It just does not happen to us. So be intentional in that way.

Another thing is the concept of localization is becoming quite important. I would certainly encourage anyone coming out of school to explore possibilities through localization. I think particularly with the current state of the economy that the interest in localization is really burgeoning—local food, local banking, keeping dollars within the local economy.

I can say from my experience with working with folks right out of school is to find a way to be involved, even if you have to be a volunteer. We have seen this lead to paid work and it can often create connections that can lead to furthering a career.

Jeanne Roy: I would like to emphasize what Dick said about volunteering. Young people nowadays want to have a job that matches their values, and that is not easy. It is hard enough to find any job, let alone one that matches your values. Often, the people I

have seen who have been successful in achieving that have often started as volunteers. So let's say my interest is in recycling. I would find the organizations involved in that and I would become a volunteer. I have had a lot of volunteers who have asked me to write recommendations for them for jobs, and that has been very helpful for them. If one truly wants to have a job in a certain area, then it helps to have patience, volunteer, and network.

Address correspondence to:

Dick Roy

Center for Earth Leadership

319 SW Washington, Suite 400

Portland, OR 97204

E-mail: dick@earthleaders.org;

www.earthleaders.org

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Dick Roy and Jeanne Roy with Center for Earth Leadership staff members

For More Information

- Visit the Center for Earth Leadership at <http://earthleaders.org>
- View The Practice of Hope, TEDTalk presented by Jeanne Roy and Dick Roy at: <http://tedxtalks.ted.com/video/TEDxConcordiaUPortland-Dick-Jea>