

In the Marketplace

Creating a greener office

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“Please Feel Guilty” was the statement that I put on the back of our Recycling Committee T-Shirts in college. The point then, as it is now, is to make people feel guilty or at least aware of their recycling decisions. According to an article written by the Resource Conservation Alliance titled Paper Consumption, the world loses 30 million forested acres per year (the size of State of Pennsylvania) and 40 percent of the wood is used for paper.

Every day at the workplace we make conscious decisions to recycle or not to recycle items such as used copy paper, junk mail, or even an empty can of soda. Mostly, we do not recycle or reuse because we are lazy and are stuck on the concept of convenience. Another reason is that the office environment is not set up properly to make recycling easy for their employees. If there is no paper recycling bin, I doubt many employees will be willing to take their recyclable paper home with them.

In preparation for this article, I set up recycling bins in each person’s office in addition to the main recycling bin that we have next to the copy machine. For the last several months, I have been weighing the amount of paper that we recycle.

Over the last three months, we recycled 225.75 pounds of paper. If we were to annualize this, we are on track for recycling 902.36 pounds per year; almost 2.5 pounds per day. Based on six full time people in the office, this is approximately 150 pounds of paper per person per year. I suspect that if we tried harder, we could recycle significantly more paper than what was addressed in this brief study.

However, my point isn’t as much about the amount of paper, but the fact that there is a system in place that at least gives people the option to recycle if they want to. If somebody throws away a piece of paper in the trash can when there is a blue recycling bin next to it, they may feel more guilty about not recycling than if the blue bin was not there at all.

Any change that we make in the office place that promotes a greener environment is a positive change. Policies and habits may not change overnight but with

direction, they can change over time. Below are 10 tips/suggestions that may make your office a better place:

- **While it is nice to recycle paper**, it is better to reduce the amount of paper that you use to begin with. We live in a time where technology allows us to store things electronically. Large paper files can now be converted to pdf formats, mailers can be replaced with emails, even faxes can be sent electronically to your computer.
- **Buy recycled paper** for your printers and copy machines.
- **Offer to buy your employees** blue trash bins for their work area.
- **Use scrap paper** as note paper and for drafts.
- **Confirm that your cleaning** service is actually recycling the paper that you have separated to the blue bins.
- **Use cloth bags** instead of paper and plastic bags when shopping at office supply stores, grocery stores, etc.
- **Office employees are usually “on the go” during lunch.** When possible, ask for NO bag when you are getting a sandwich at your favorite quick service food operation. How many times have you thrown away unopened packets of ketchup and unused plastic ware and napkins?
- **Have a recyclable bottle & can bin in the office.** Donate the proceeds to your favorite charity.
- **Keep reusable silverware at your office.** If you like coffee, bring a travel mug to your favorite coffee shop.
- **Recycle Reduce & Reuse.** It is amazing how many things we throw away that are actually recyclable. Even candy wrappers are made out of plastic.

Happy Earth Day!