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Green Team

When payroll and HR solutions provider Paylocity moved into a new building last June, employees were surrounded by a lot of green—green features, that is. The carpets and workstations at Paylocity's new Arlington Heights, Illinois, location are made of recycled materials, and energy-efficient lighting and point-of-source water heaters cut energy usage. The company has also moved toward paperless payroll for its clients. Still, founder Steve Sarowitz felt the 10-year-old company could do even more to reduce its environmental impact. Just before the move, he e-mailed Paylocity's 180 employees about forming a "green team" to explore how the company could further its green mission. Soon, a 14-employee team was brainstorming a long list of initiatives, such as expanding Paylocity's recycling program, switching to biodegradable products and giving employees ceramic coffee mugs instead of paper cups. Paylocity's green team also calculated the cost savings of the steps already being taken, such as telecommuting. "We want our own internal green environmental conscience asking us, 'Is there a better way to be a good corporate citizen?'" says Sarowitz, 42.

Going green is red-hot, and now businesses are going a step further by actively engaging employees in strategy sessions around the issue. An April 2007 survey by Adecco, an international HR company, found that 52 percent of employed adults felt their companies should do more to be environmentally friendly. Green teams are not only a positive environmental force, but they also get employees excited about something that's not directly related to their jobs—an advantage for small companies whose benefits packages can't always compete with those of larger firms. "Being environmentally and socially responsible can give [growing companies] the edge they need to play on par with the bigger companies," says Jennifer Woofter, president of Strategic Sustainability Consulting, which helps small and midsize companies implement cost-effective green strategies.

Going green, however, remains a challenge for companies. "[A lack of green] education hinders people from getting into the movement," says Ashley Katz of the U.S. Green Building Council, the membership-based organization that developed Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design, or LEED, a nationally accepted green-building rating system.

You'll have to lead the way at first. Woofter recommends picking an employee from each department for your green team. But keep the team small. In a 100-employee company, "anything bigger than eight [people] starts to get too bureaucratic," she says. Ask the team to set some goals for the next 12 months that can be tracked in terms of implementation progress and cost savings. Woofter also suggests starting with the low-hanging fruit, like encouraging employees to use both sides of printer paper. Help your green team get off the ground, then stay in the loop. "There needs to be a consistent flow of information up to the CEO," Woofter says.

Sarowitz's instructions for Paylocity's green team were to stay cost-neutral or to save money whenever possible. Watching employees' ideas blossom is leading to another kind of green: Costly turnover is down, and Paylocity's 2007 sales hit \$17.5 million. "You just have to say, 'Let's do this,' and your employees will do it for you," Sarowitz says. "Just point your company in the right direction."