

Name:

Susanna

Job title:

Principle sustainability advisor

Career:

I completed 10 GCSEs and then went on to do a degree in contemporary history (BA) and a Masters in business and the environment (MSc). Skills I learned at school which I can still employ in my work are teamwork, writing, problem-solving, organising, maths (budgets), presentation skills, reading, ICT.

After I left school I worked as an administrator in housing policy (e.g. looked at insulation etc). I got more interested in 'green housing' and moved on to look at green buildings. After that, I became interested in business strategy and moved to this area. I have always worked more towards the policy and government level rather than the corporate level (I have never worked corporate!), but had to look at finding good projects that interested me.

Responsibilities:

- Project management,
- Report writing,
- Running workshops (with corporates e.g. Boots),
- Writing a lot of emails,
- Meetings (one to one management and team meetings) and
- Writing articles (press and blogs, greenbiz, magazines) both for promotion and for awareness.
- Presentations at conferences where other corporate sustainability people are the audience.
- Develop close relationships with partners and visit companies.

Essential skills in my job:

- Teamwork,
- Communication,
- IT-skills,
- Project management, organisation and planning
- Decision-making,
- Problem solving,
- Facilitation (leading the workshops but you are capacity building. Eg. What will boots do and by the end we will be able to answer that question),
- Be able to give advice,
- Relationship management (responsible for a number of accounts whom you need to give advice to and sell them things).

What I need to know in my job:

- Understanding of the role of business and the constraints and motivations and structures that are in business. 'We want businesses to recognise they are being better if they are more sustainable, but that they are more successful by being more sustainable'.
- Technical expertise of sustainability e.g. global trends of population growth, water use, ('although not an expert, I will know enough to steer them in the right direction for specialist information').
- Knowledge about climate change: more the political aspects, but need to have an understanding of the science in order to have credibility. E.g. difference between ppm of certain pollutants and how to measure – again, know enough but also know where to steer them for that specialist knowledge.



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I work at Forum for the Future which works in partnership with other organisations to create more sustainable practice. The company carries out its own independent analysis of what would be the most effective rather than just going with what the organisation thinks. There is a lot of problem-solving, for example, Coca cola say 'we want to improve our carbon emissions' and my response would be 'no you need to look at obesity which is a bigger issue'; Sky say 'we want to help the rainforest' and there may be bigger issues (such as working with Rupert Murdoch).

My daily tasks include project management, report writing, running workshops (with corporates e.g. boots), writing a lot of emails, meetings (one to one management and team meetings) and writing articles (press and blogs, greenbiz, magazines) both for promotion and for awareness. I also write and hold presentations at conferences where other corporate sustainability people are the audience. It is one of my most important tasks to develop close relationships with partners and visit companies. I travel overseas about twice a year and I am out of the office 2 or 3 times a week within London. I travel outside of London once every 6 weeks or so.

Most interesting in my work is having to learn about sustainability. Sustainability and the development of organisations moves really quickly so you need to keep up to date as it is changing every day. There is always new stuff to learn and new developments. It is also really nice to work on the solution rather the problem. But also, because we have a clear understanding of climate change, you know the extent of the problem and it can be quite depressing. Sometimes you feel like you are trying to fight a losing battle. There is evidence to show that painting a picture of an apocalypse will deter people in helping, but if you paint it as 'social justice' with a positive picture, it is a lot more effective. Part of our role is to do that translation, but it requires a lot of personal resilience because it means you have to hold that knowledge without it getting you down.

The key to my role is to have enough understanding of science that you know what the facts are, but also knowing who to go to (i.e. the specialists) to go further to understand it deeper. You don't need to know all the science to do the job. I feel my role is more about exposing the truth and making use of it. It is about bringing science to life and helping to take action to make it better. I am faced with evidence, and interpreting the evidence and communicating the evidence to other non-experts.

My advice in general about choosing a career such as this is keep an open mind. I always think of Steve Jobs' talk when he speaks about 'connecting the dots'. I look back at my life and it all looks really deliberate but it wasn't. At multiple points up to here, it has been about making a decision based on what you are enjoying at that moment. It is not about having a grand plan.