



# How to Eat a Green Elephant

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A SUSTAINABILITY TOOLKIT FOR THE WORKPLACE & HOME LIFE

**Bite 4**

## Eliminate our contribution to conditions that undermine people's capacity to meet their basic human needs.

### What's the problem?

So far we've been mostly concerned with our effect on the natural systems we rely on everyday. This last principle focusses our attention on how our decisions affect each other.

Quite honestly, **the world would be fine without us** humans. There would be no need for the first 3 principles if it weren't for people's over indulgence, wastefulness, and interruption of natural processes. But there are people, and a lot of us, and we all need to be taken care of. Unfortunately, most of the earth's population live in impoverished circumstances of one form or another, and people aren't interested in saving the environment or being considerate to their fellow man when they're finding it hard to survive. Our civil society could collapse under the weight of unsustainable consumption, if we continue to see such a dearth and inbalance in the provision of basic human needs.

But basic needs aren't just physical (clean air, water, food, living space) but emotional, some would even say spiritual, as well (respect, dignity, affection, understanding, identity). In fact there is evidence to support the notion that once these intangible needs are taken care of, people need less physical resources to feel content,

*"Looked at in this way, humanity's need for resources is really quite limited. Once people focus on the preciousness of their own lives and how they sell their lives for money, they become naturally frugal. On average their expenses drop quickly by 20% or more."*

*- System Condition Four, Jill Rosenblum*



# So, what can we do?

In general, Principle 4 encourages us to be fair and efficient in meeting human needs. To do that there are two aspects that need to be considered:

## 1) The Technical.

This deals with increasing the efficiency of the way we use our resources. That is to say using less stuff to provide more human services or making a little go a long way.

## 2) The Social.

This concerns the increasing fairness of use of each unit of resource. Which means making sure everyone has equal access to all human services whether natural or man-made.

# 1. Don't be Stingy

## At Work

- **Mix pro-bono or non-profits' projects into the production schedule.**

- **Send meaningful gifts.** Sometimes non-profits create products to sell as fundraisers, so instead of buying the usual corporate gifts, find gifts that support a cause.

## At Home

- **Volunteer.** For those who don't have the money to spare, there's always time. Red Cross, Big Brother, Habitat who cares where, just as long as you show you care.

- **Donate \$ to worthy causes.** For those who don't have the time to spare, giving financially helps to support the ones who do.

- **Tip well.** When eating out, remember servers are people too. Yes it might be their job to serve you, but consider it another way of supporting the local economy.

## 2. Shop Fairly

- **Buying fair trade goods** means you're supporting small farmers and craftspeople, the people who really need the money, instead of multinational corporations. Your support encourages organic farming and other eco-friendly practices and might save you some money in the process. For example 30 cups of fair trade coffee costs roughly \$12 as opposed to \$54 at a coffee chain.<sup>1</sup>

- **Buy Sweatshop free.** Retailers like JustShirts.ca give us the options of wearing our conscience on our sleeves, literally.

**You can find more fair-trade shopping options at:**

- **The Fair Trade Federation** - [www.fairtradefederation.org/ht/display/EventDetails/i/6823](http://www.fairtradefederation.org/ht/display/EventDetails/i/6823)
- **Sweat-Free Communities** - [www.sweatfree.org/shoppingguide](http://www.sweatfree.org/shoppingguide)



Some of the stylish threads available at JuistShirts.ca



[www.transfairusa.org](http://www.transfairusa.org)



[www.fairtrade.net](http://www.fairtrade.net)



[www.rainforest-alliance.org](http://www.rainforest-alliance.org)

Look out for any of these labels to ensure that strict economic, environmental and social rules are followed in the preparation of the product.

### 3. Get Just the Right Amount

Honestly this should be the mantra for the entire manual. It perfectly sums up what needs to be done without threatening to take away our right to consume. Right now the US is way ahead of the competition in the world-wide consumer race. With 4% of the population, Americans currently use a quarter of the world's resources<sup>2</sup>. Considering the finite services available, that means there's less to go around for everybody else. Using the suggestions found throughout the manual we can work towards reducing our tendency to acquire more than we need, to one where we only get just the right amount. No more, no less.

# Now What?

So there you have it. If you've made it this far, hopefully the thought of taking on the task of sustainability isn't as scary as it was when we started.

This manual has shown that there's a lot that one person can do to help slow down or reverse the course society's taking. And most of the suggestions aren't even drastic changes. If you use your purchasing power wisely to support local businesses, clean energy and natural alternatives to products you use everyday you're well on your way to complete green-ness.

Plus there's more information out there to help. Tons of books, TV channels, magazines, web sites and blogs concerning sustainability are available, and more eco-friendly products are becoming available to the responsible consumer every month. There's still more to be done, but the progress that's been made so far has been because of individuals like you realizing that change needs to happen and the easiest place to start is with yourself.

This manual was intended to be a stepping stone to more intensive reading and digging into the topic of sustainability. Some of the sources are included to help get you started, but don't stop there. Get involved, do the exercises, share your findings, but above all else don't be afraid to take the next bite, remember,

*The size of the problem equals the size of the opportunity.*

- TheNaturalStep.org

## Principle 4 Sources

1 [www.fairtradefederation.org/ht/display/EventDetails/i/6823](http://www.fairtradefederation.org/ht/display/EventDetails/i/6823)

Fair Trade products:

[www.fairtradefederation.org/ht/display/EventDetails/i/6823](http://www.fairtradefederation.org/ht/display/EventDetails/i/6823)

[www.sweatfree.org/shoppingguide](http://www.sweatfree.org/shoppingguide)

Fair trade certification:

[www.transfairusa.org](http://www.transfairusa.org)

[www.fairtrade.net](http://www.fairtrade.net)

[www.rainforest-alliance.org](http://www.rainforest-alliance.org)

2 [www.naturalstep.org.nz/downloads/TNS\\_sc\\_four.pdf](http://www.naturalstep.org.nz/downloads/TNS_sc_four.pdf)