



# GREEN IN THE C-SUITE

**FMS ARE AMONG** the passionate, progressive executives setting the sustainability agenda for large organizations

by greg zimmerman, executive editor

Sustainability has moved into the corner office. No longer the pet project of a single-minded, pie-eyed soul, sustainability—everything from resource efficiency to greenhouse gas reductions—has migrated from a “nice-to-have” proposition to an organizational imperative. As a result, many organizations, with the idea that a top-down approach is most effective, are hiring sustainability executives with titles like chief sustainability officer and vice president of sustainability to head up those efforts.

“The role of the sustainability executive has emerged because of market demands,” says Ellen Weinreb, founder of The Weinreb Group, an executive recruiting firm that has contributed to two research papers in the last two years examining the chief sustainability officer trend. “The biggest value the sustainability executive provides is translating consumer demands, public policy, global warming, et cetera, into business priorities, like saving money, creating opportunity, reducing risk and enhancing image.”

But being a sustainability executive is challenging—there’s never enough time, money, or resources. Sustainability executives spend a lot of time managing projects and people for which they don’t have direct control. “Sustainability executives are notorious for working long hours,” says Charlotte Matthews,

vice president of sustainability for Related Companies, a New York City-based developer. “We get our work done after everyone else has left, because we spend all day following up with people.”

It’s good work if you can get it, though, because sustainability executives see themselves as making a difference, not just in their organizations but also in their communities, and for the environment as a whole. The stories of sustainability executives in several organizations illustrate success stories in providing value to their organization, as well as advice for those considering a similar climb up the organizational ladder.

While these new executives come from a wide range of backgrounds, educations, and previous organizational roles, they do have several things in common: a firm understanding of all aspects of the organization, the ability to build bridges between departments and people with disparate agendas, including outside the organization, and, importantly, an unswerving passion for sustainability.

Because sustainability touches just about every aspect of an organization, sustainability executives are necessarily generalists. Therefore, sustainability executives have job descriptions that usually are short on specifics but long on potential responsibilities.

If that sounds familiar, it’s probably because the facility executive often has a similar role. “The sustainability executive has to have a holistic view,” says Bill Conley, founder and chief





“A big challenge is managing people and projects that don’t directly report to you.”

— Nurit Katz, chief sustainability officer, UCLA

sustainability officer for CFM2, a facility management and sustainability consulting firm. Conley says that the facility or real estate executive may be the de facto sustainability executive, simply because they’re in the position best suited to handle the role. Oftentimes, it’s a facility or real estate person who moves into the sustainability role.

At AT&T, John Schulz, now the director of sustainable operations, had spent five years in the company’s real estate group, working in data and project management, when he says he recognized an opportunity to put more emphasis on sustainable operations. He wrote what he called his “Jerry Maguire memo” — arguing that the company was missing an opportunity to incorporate sustainability and efficiency. He became the greenhouse gas emissions guru and developed the company’s first inventory. A year and a half ago, Schulz was promoted to his current role, working in the newly formed, eight-person sustainability organization, and reporting directly to Charlene Lake, appointed in 2009 as the company’s first chief sustainability officer.

### Understand The Organization

While facility executive to sustainability executive is a natural evolution, what’s most important is a strong knowledge of the workings and priorities of the organization, say experts. A 2011 report from The Weinreb Group titled “CSO Back Story: How CSOs Reached The C-Suite” looked at the first 29 CSOs at public companies. According to the report, the CSOs had been with the company for an average of 16 years before given the CSO title (25 of the 29 had been hired from within the organization).

“You have to try to get as broad an understanding of your organization as you

can, so you can see opportunities,” says Schulz. It’s not hard to understand why this is important: It’s because the sustainability executive needs to work with everyone in the organization. To set the sustainability agenda for the organization, building bridges to other departments is a must.

At the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), Nurit Katz, chief sustainability officer, says she works closely with faculty, students, administration, and every other university department — including facilities, where her sustainability department is housed.

“A big challenge is managing people and projects that don’t directly report to you,” says Katz. This takes leadership, tenacity and the ability to get people to work together. “Sustainability means crossing silos in an organization,” says Conley. “It means not breaking down silos, but uniting them.”

Employees do usually understand that sustainability is important for the organization, but they’re busy too. So it’s incumbent upon the sustainability executive to show them the value of what they’re working on and how they benefit

### Where Is The Sustainability Executive?

Every organization is different in terms of where the sustainability executive resides in the organizational hierarchy. Sometimes, it’s within facilities or corporate real estate. Just as often it’s not.

»»» At PNC, executive vice president of corporate real estate Gary Saulson is widely known throughout the company as the sustainability guru. He’s led the corporation to 174 LEED-certified projects (the most of any company in the U.S.) and worked closely with the U.S. Green Building Council to develop its LEED Volume rating system. But Saulson recently hired a director of sustainability, as well as an energy manager, to take over some of the sustainability specifics.

“We needed to hire someone full time, because it could no longer be me,” says Saulson. That sustainability director still works closely with Saulson and is “joined at the hip,” with the energy manager. The sustainability manager is actually now part of a different department and has a wider range of responsibilities than Saulson ever could’ve taken on himself. As one example, Saulson says, the company has reduced its paper consumption by more than 15 percent in the last three years. That’s something that might not have been possible if the effort was led by the corporate real estate department alone.

»»» At UCLA, Nurit Katz, chief sustainability officer, is essentially her own department, but is housed with the facilities management team. “This is a great location for sustainability,” she says, “because so much is related to operations.” She’s supplemented her MBA and masters in public policy with a Building Operator Certification course, because she says she now recognizes how important facility knowledge is to her success in sustainability.

»»» At AT&T, John Schulz cut his teeth in corporate real estate, before moving into the sustainability department. He and the other seven members of his department report directly to the chief sustainability officer.

Ultimately, because every organization is different, the location in the organizational hierarchy shouldn’t be of critical concern. “Where the position reports isn’t as important as the fact that the position exists,” says Saulson.

— Greg Zimmerman, executive editor

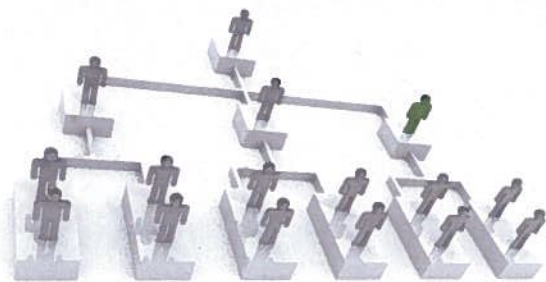
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from particular initiatives. Indeed, it's critical for the sustainability executive to frame any argument in the terms that emphasize the priorities of the employee, department, or organization at large. "You can't be seen as just a greenie or tree-hugger who is just trying to do the 'right thing,'" says Dan Probst, chairman of energy and sustainability

services for Jones Lang LaSalle. "You have to be seen as the person driving performance, implementing operational savings and creating money to redeploy in other areas. This is not just about saving polar bears, it's about business efficiency."

This is a strategy Weinreb emphasizes as well: "Be a 'corporate chame-

leon,'" she says. "Use the language of the person you're talking to. Figure out 10 different ways to say the same thing."

#### Tout Successes

Much like facility managers, sustainability executives understand that if they don't tell anyone what they're doing, no one will know.

"It's a 'what have you done for me lately?' thing," says Conley. "The trick is to show how much money you've saved. Use dashboards. Put signs in the bathroom. Show how sustainable practices benefit all in the organization."



"The most important skill — come up with original ideas. You have to be creative."

— Gary Saulson, executive vice president, director of corporate real estate, PNC Bank

With 70,000 people on campus, Katz says communication is critical — she says she spends much of her time doing presentations for internal audiences, as well as speaking at conferences and trade shows. Matthews, too: "I cannot accept all the interviews and speaking invitations I get," she says.

And sustainability executives are under no illusion that they get "special treatment" because they work on projects or initiatives that generally have a "feel good" story. It still has to make business sense.

This extends to justifying projects and discussing them in the language of business. Matthews says she doesn't even blink when she hears "no." "If someone disagrees it's because I haven't made the right argument yet," she says.

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"I don't fear 'no.' I expect 'no.' Tell me what the roadblock is and I'll get more data and reframe the argument."

"We don't have a secret pot of money lying around for sustainability projects," says Schulz. "Projects have to stand on their own business cases." And even then, in what is still a tough economy, the pitch can sometimes be difficult. So

sustainability executives have to make sure they are always explaining both to their executive-level peers and to employees what they're working on.

While the challenge of winning hearts and minds certainly is real, the bigger challenge is finding the time and resources to choose projects with the greatest potential benefit to

### So You Want To Be A Sustainability Executive?

If you're thinking of making sustainability a career, seven experts offer tips on the skills that make for a successful sustainability executive:

»»» "An MBA is useful, but not necessary.

Knowledge of finance is critical, but so is the ability to take a holistic approach." — Bill Conley, chief sustainability officer, CFM2

»»» "Think about if you thrive in a generalist environment. You have to be able to work on 500 projects at once without much supervision. It's very similar to being an entrepreneur — you're managing all aspects of the department, the website, accounting, sales, customer service, marketing." — Nurit Katz, chief sustainability officer, UCLA

»»» "You have to be willing to be tenacious, stick your neck out and stick to your principles. But also remember, people don't like to be preached to." — Charlotte Matthews, vice president of sustainability, The Related Companies

»»» Look for a gap that needs to be filled. Recognize opportunities by understanding not only where advancement is possible, but also what you can do to best help the organization be more efficient. "Also, make friends with the finance folks." — John Schulz, director of sustainable operations, AT&T

»»» "You need to have good communication skills. Be a good logical thinker." — Dan Probst, chairman of energy and sustainability, Jones Lang LaSalle

»»» Leadership and the ability to build bridges are the most critical skills. But you have to be willing to engage employees, as well. Remember, some of the best suggestions for efficiencies come from employees. — Ellen Weinreb, founder, The Weinreb Group

»»» "The most important skill — come up with original ideas. You have to be creative. Have a high energy level." — Gary Saulson, executive vice president, director of corporate real estate, PNC Bank

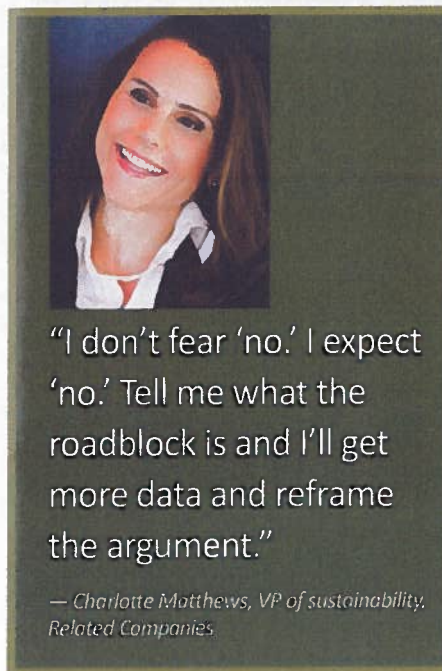
If a sustainability executive is not in the plans for your organization, Katz offers one last bit of encouragement: "You can make an impact in this field from any position. You don't need to be a CSO."

— Greg Zimmerman, executive editor

the organization. As Katz says: "This is less a people challenge and more a time and resources challenge."

Indeed, the lack of means available to sustainability executives is mentioned most frequently as the biggest challenge. "Sustainability executives have limited resources," says Weinreb. "So it's important to create value."

Most sustainability departments are small operations with huge purview. "Lots of CSOs, me included, tend to have few direct resources and a lean staff," Katz says. From a sustainability perspective, Katz is not only responsible for sustainable policy on campus — including waste, water, energy, greenhouse gases, procurement and operations — she also helps define how to incorporate sustainability into the curriculum, as well as turn the campus into a "living, learning laboratory" for students.



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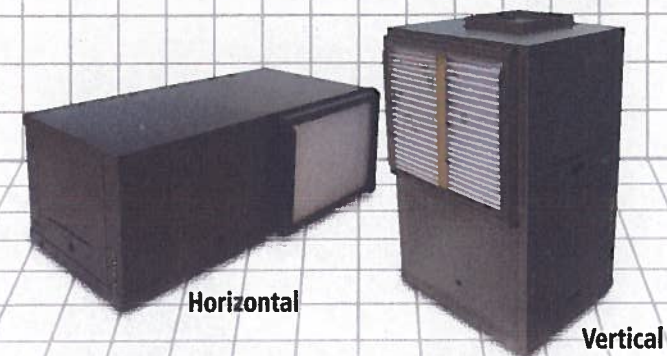
— Charlotte Matthews, VP of sustainability, Related Companies

Matthews, who says her responsibilities include "anything that doesn't get picked up by the other business units," has one person working with her, and is trying to hire a second. But she says she actually enjoys the challenge of a small department. "I'm comfortable being lean and mean," she says. "It's an incredible freedom."

But how to draw boundaries? How to learn how to pick projects and areas of focus with the most impact? "Prioritizing is about doing the right things at the right

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location in the right order," says Probst. "The key is to find what resonates."

Schulz adds: "What we've found to be effective to get people's attention is using a very data-driven process. We use the tenets of quality management and look at how we can eliminate waste and be more efficient. And then, how we can make it all visible."

Schulz mentions AT&T's Energy Scorecard project as one example of a success. By giving each building in the company's portfolio a rating based on energy efficiency and what's happening at those buildings to continue to be efficient, and then making those results public, Schulz says the sustainability team was able to tap into employee

competitiveness to get results. "Success propels success," he says.

One important aspect of success, say these experts, is recognizing failure—or at least understanding limitations.

"Admit things that can't be done," says Conley. "Show flaws as well as successes. This creates credibility." Thankfully, says Matthews, sustainability executives are generally an honest bunch. "We network a lot and exchange a lot of information," she says. "We'll talk about what's working and how to improve."



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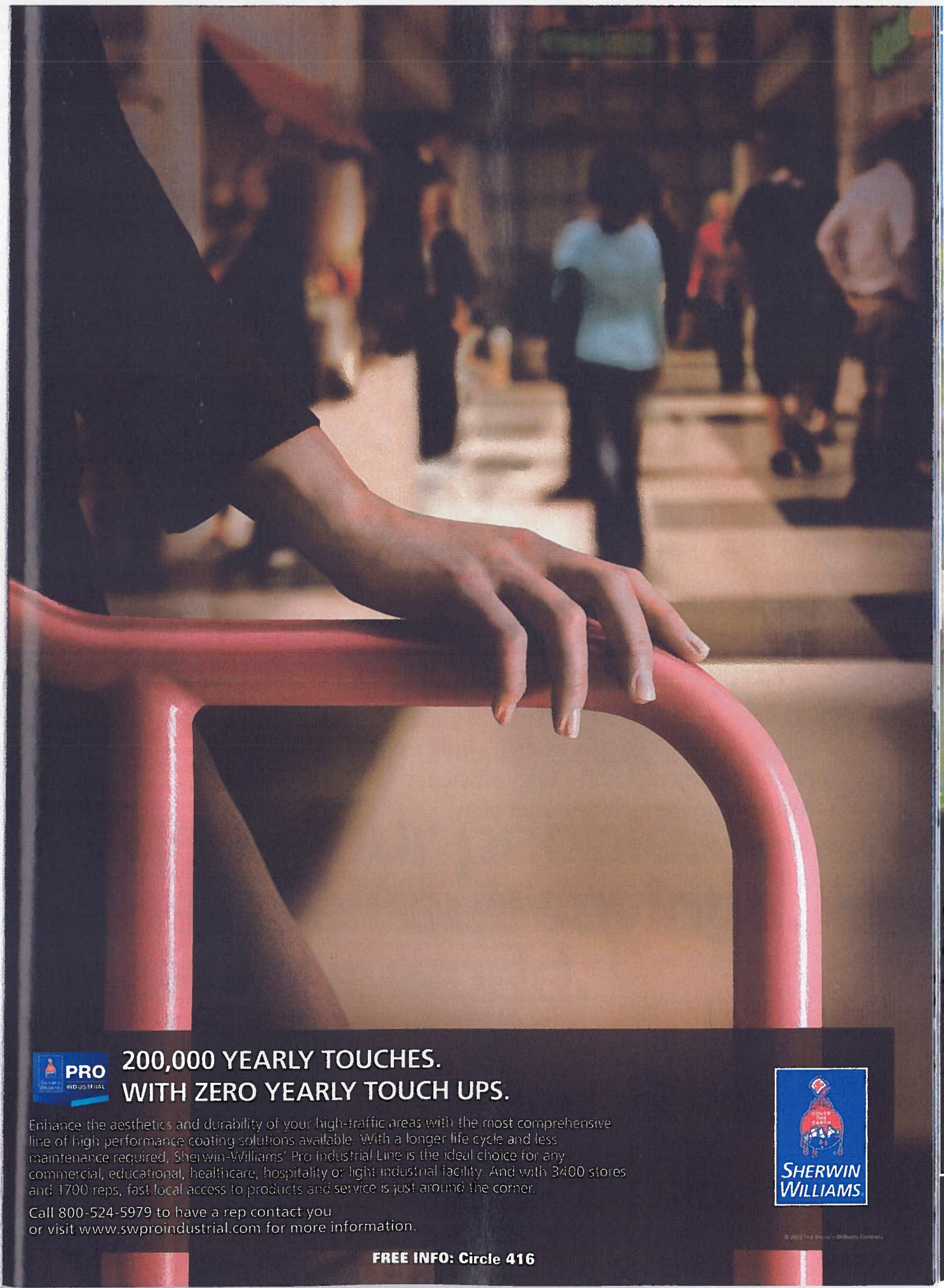
— John Schulz, director of sustainable operations, AT&T

That also illustrates another characteristic of most sustainability executives: sustainability is well more than a career—it's a firmly held belief that is as much a part of their personal as professional lives. "The field of sustainability draws people who want to make an impact," says Katz.

Oftentimes, it's the infectious enthusiasm for their positions—the notion that they're not just doing a job, they're making a real difference—that wins these fans.

"In general, people want sustainability to win," says Matthews. ■

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