

17.11: The Tenth Commandment

EDUCATION IN SUSTAINABILITY IS ESSENTIAL; IT MUST EXTEND TO ALL AGES AND STRATA OF SOCIETY, IT MUST BE PROMULGATED THROUGH ALL MEDIA, AND IT IS THE RESPONSIBILITY OF ALL WHO HAVE EXPERTISE IN SUSTAINABILITY

Although the achievement of sustainability is the central challenge facing humanity, most people know pathetically little about it. The reader of this chapter belongs to a small fraction of the populace who have been exposed to the idea of sustainability. If asked, a distressingly large number of people would probably say that they know little about sustainability (and some would say that they do not even care or that they are even hostile to the concept!). Therefore, education is essential and a key to achieving sustainability.

Education in sustainability must begin early with children in primary school and should be integrated into curricula from kindergarten through graduate school. By providing containers for recyclables in grade schools, there is some small benefit from the waste paper, plastics, and aluminum cans collected, but a much greater benefit in the lessons of sustainability that those containers illustrate. Green chemistry should be part of the background of every student graduating with a university degree in chemistry and the principles of green engineering should be part of the knowledge base of every engineering graduate. But of equal—often greater—importance is the education of people in nontechnical areas in the principles of sustainability. Lawyers, political scientists, economists, and medical professionals should all graduate with education in sustainability.

A particular challenge is that of informing the general public of the principles of sustainability and of its importance. The general public has more choice in its sources of information than does the captive audience of a student body, so the challenge of informing them about sustainability is greater. In this respect the media and the internet have key roles to play. Unfortunately, relative to the large amounts of media time devoted to the salacious antics of some attention-seeking fools—matters that have virtually no relevance to the lives of everyday citizens—almost no air time is devoted to sustainability, which is highly relevant to the lives of all. Therefore, those who have an interest in, and knowledge of sustainability have an obligation to get the message out through the media and the internet.

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