

## case study

# Going Beyond Recycling by Embracing Total Sustainability: A case study of Rosen Hotels

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## Introduction

The hotel industry may be seen lethargic towards sustainability and their main motivation to act is through political and monetary gains. Nevertheless, recent studies indicate that in cases where it was the initial drive, it has transitioned to embrace both the economic and preservation value. In other cases, many organizations fell behind because “going green” actually requires a heavy financial investment. Conversely, some hoteliers, including Mr. Harris Rosen, simply believe that it is the “right thing to do” (Tzschentke et al. 2004). According to Bramwell and Lane (2011) the notion of balance between the pillars of sustainability has met critics who argued that such a balance cannot exist because economic growth conflicts with environmental preservation consequently it is deemed a “difficult trade-off. Cater’s (1995) argument is further reinforced by Hunter (2002) who stated that balance is a camouflage since economic growth is often the primary concern (Bramwell & Lane, 2011). Although the critics of sustainable development argued this over a decade ago, this current study aims to explore how the balance between environmental preservation and societal and economical gains can be achieved. This case study highlights Rosen Hotels’ commitment towards sustainability by embracing new principles that are beyond Elkington’s (1994) “triple bottom line”. In as much as the “triple bottom” of economical, ecological and societal principles is implemented within Rosen Hotels, this case study organization has included “human resources” and “wellness and healthcare” as new sustainability attributes. This case study examines new dimensions not previously addressed in-depth in sustainability literature. In particular, this case study aims to:

- review how the green initiative was initiated, embraced and implemented by associates within Rosen Hotels.
- highlight the progressive and participative approach to sustainability using real-life examples from Rosen Hotels.
- reflect potential constraints to green initiatives and how they were overcome to promote effective practices in the hotel industry.
- examine the opinions, preferences and reaction of guests in response to the green initiatives undertaken by Rosen Hotels.

- introduce a new “Wellness and Healthcare” dimension of sustainability.
- investigate the role of human resources and senior managers as a collaborative element of sustainability efforts.

## Literature Review

There have been numerous studies focusing on environmental management and sustainable development issues since its official conception through the UNWTO’s Brundtland Commission in 1987. For example, sustainability is defined as a process that “meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (Jones et al. 2013, p. 12). There have also been several attempts to re-define and extend the definition beyond Elkington’s (1994) the Triple Bottom Line Model that consists of three pillars which are economic, environmental and social dimensions in the hotel industry (Mihalic et al. 2011). Mihalic et al. (2011) extended the model by adding three more dimensions, which are customer satisfaction, environmental education and power to change and participation that enhance and complement the already existing triple bottom line pillars.

As critics pound on the motivation of corporations communicating and integrating sustainability policies to their business strategy as “interpreted as being developed around efficiency and a commitment to securing a competitive advantage within the market place, and they reflect business demands rather than fundamental concerns for sustainability or the maintenance and enhancement of natural concerns of natural ecosystems” the essence is the road to sustainability is still being paved (Jones et al. 2013, p. 12). The existence of all the elements; economic, environmental and social can be paradoxical in nature as the pursuit of one at the expense of the other has proved to be detrimental; as witnessed with the economic pursuit without regarding the environmental role, leaving these attributes to be mutually exclusive (Houdre, 2008). However as Stipanuk and Ninemeier (1996) put it the hotel industry’s motivation in environmental issues originated from a cost-benefit perspective. The economic dimension still remains a point of contention and platform for lethargic approach to sustainable policies (Hsieh, 2012). Given this, this current case study explored the three dimensions and further identified new attributes that add to its sustainable policies. They reflect active sustainable policies and creating sustainable competitive advantage.

The fundamental basis of sustainable development as the process

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to achieving sustainability provides the essence of our case study as we evaluated their practices in terms of those dimensions. Furthermore, this study explored the additional attributes of human resources and the health and wellness which are remarkable within Rosen Hotels and have led to the proposal of defining sustainability within the hospitality industry with a new perspective that goes beyond the now deemed traditional dimensions economic, environmental and social; as we highlight the new dimensions that also “merit attention” (Jones et al., 2013).

## **Development and Implementation of Sustainability Practices within Rosen Hotels**

Ms. Dee Dee Baggit, Associate Director of Engineering and Facilities, stated that “Mr. Harris Rosen began by educating his management team and then held fun meetings to bring associates onboard” (Rosen Hotels, 2009). The hustle and bustle started when an email was sent out alerting all associates that Rosen Hotels was going to embark on a new journey. All associates were invited to participate in and contribute to such important green initiatives. The call on initiating the green initiatives shifted the atmosphere and working environment where the associates were given the platform to participate in the change of adopting the new green culture. Associates at all levels were encouraged to suggest ideas for adopting a green initiative. Moreover, to ensure the message reached as many associates as possible, bulletins and memos in English, Spanish, and French were provided. According to Enhert (2009), the relevance of the approach set up by the Human Resources Department to motivate and maintain associates’ participation in sustainability relies heavily on inclusion. The same philosophy was adapted when inviting Rosen Hotels’ associates to share their ideas about starting numerous environmentally friendly initiatives within Rosen Hotels.

The Engineering Department took the initiative to stop “doing business as usual” by going beyond paper recycling by forming a task team with other departments in the decision making intended to promote a culture of sustainability. The task team relied on effective communication to educate and bring about change. These points were reinforced during an interview held with the Director of Engineering Mr. Chuck Barrett and then Associate Director of Engineering Ms. Dee Dee Baggit (now Director of Engineering and Facilities). When asked “What was the greatest hurdle they faced in introducing the green initiatives?” their answer was “People and their habits.” Even after effective communication, the associate may take longer to get rid of old habits and get used to switching off lights when leaving the office. However, whenever Mr. Harris Rosen, the President of Rosen Hotels, walks through the property (in his usual khakis and polo shirt) and finds an associate has left the lights on, he informs them that they owe the environment and him a dollar! “What a way to jolt the associates’ memory and instill responsibility

for cultivating the sustainable culture.

Rosen Hotels embraced sustainability by encouraging associates participation through formation of teams charged with developing and implementing specific sustainability policies and practices. Conservation as a business practice was initially considered a heavy trade off detached from climate change concerns. Rosen Hotels started conserving energy and water when it was not yet “fashionable” or appreciated even by guests (Green Lodging News, 2008). When initially the Rosen Shingle Creek Engineering Department replaced incandescent lights with fluorescent lighting and eliminated about 1,400 bulbs, it was not received well by some guests as well as some associates. This was initially perceived by some as a cost cutting measure to use low cost dim lighting at the expense of guests who were not yet attuned and knowledgeable of sustainable efforts. The attitude was different then, yet in spite of the pessimistic remarks and apparent unprecedented negative attitude, Rosen Hotels gradually changed a culture in order to become more environmentally friendly and minimize costs at the risk of losing market share. The people began recognizing and learning about the drastic impact of the carbon footprint on the natural resources. Time was required for the impact of carbon on the environment to be understood by society.

The change emerged and created with it a “green consumer” who now pays attention to what the housekeeper does or does not do to save water, and checks the availability of the recycling bins in the guest rooms! Guests are asked to evaluate their stay in a survey using the “Customer Metrix” which focuses on sustainability. The guests’ feedback and level of interest is significant as it indicates the guest has evolved and is aware of the need to conserve (Customer Metrix, 2011). The study reflects the guests’ comments were distinctive in that they had grown critical and were even surprised at the mistakes that housekeepers made. For example, when the guests hung the towel they expected the housekeeper not to replace the towels. However, reviews showed that housekeepers still replaced towels to the disappointment of the guests. Guests expected housekeepers to be trained in the new communication realm that should now exist between the housekeeper and the guest hence any miscommunication and errors by housekeepers “undermined the Rosen Hotels’ environmental policy” as outlined in one of the guest’s comments (Customer Metrix, 2011).

These errors indicated the need to continuously reinforce the new culture through pre-shift discussions and formal training programs. In an era where the guest/consumer seeks a green compliant corporation to partner and foster a beneficial relationship, the bi-linear relationship emerged into a tri-fold relationship. Furthermore, where previously the client might have agreed to do business transactions when the environmental party was not being served, the perception now is that it is no longer “business as usual”. The use of guests’ comments and efforts has provided much needed stakeholder consul-

tation and insight. Nevertheless, guests who still prefer old ways (such as expecting that cold room after a hectic day) still exist albeit they are gradually dwindling. The Customer Metrix (2011) showed some of the guests would be bothered by the conservation efforts as they expressed annoyance at dim rooms and low flow faucet taps reflecting that some guests may prefer the same old habits regardless of the negative impact to the environment.

The Rosen Hotel Green Team initiative was conceived to reinforce the green culture through innovative and substantial participation from a mix of management and line associates from different departments as explained by Ms. Dee Dee Baggit when she was interviewed (Interview with D. Baggit, 2013). They meet once a month and employ two methodologies through Monitoring and Survey Analysis. Both of these methods have been used to upkeep, maintain and monitor green initiatives and audit gaps and functioning areas for the betterment of the environmental policy. After the survey and implementation of the monitoring methods are obtained, the results are meant to spearhead the Engineering Department towards an action plan that ensures continuity of practicing and embedding a green and sustainable culture. By measuring the level of understanding on the part of the associates, positive as well as negative habit changes towards sustainability could be assessed. Regressive habits indicate stagnation, which may result in when the culture is not readily reinforced. This serves to underline the progress that sustainable efforts have made within operations, as well as providing a means of measuring performance and seeking development in all dimensions mentioned.

The Green Team further reinforces the distinguished culture of inclusiveness where associates are involved throughout the process of adoption, adaptation and settlement. As Ms. Dee Dee Baggit, the explained this in an interview: "the Green Team seeks to expand their knowledge, where the gathered survey is used to maintain associates' level of knowledge and the monitoring methods to highlight any premise that is not working well for example a leaking faucet; overall, to fix what is wrong and combat any hindering factor on our progress towards sustainability" (Interview with D. Baggit, 2013). Furthermore, Rosen Hotels has long been implementing preventative maintenance methods to achieve sustainability by purchasing and using technologies such as Energy Management System (EMS) equipment and monitoring them, as well as performing quarterly, annual or monthly checks on laundry and kitchen equipment. The use of Green Seal products and resources such as High Efficiency Particulate Air Filters (HEPA) is easily monitored by following a preventative maintenance schedule which keeps every performance on record. In addition to their efforts, Rosen Hotels created a website (<http://www.rosengreenmeetings.com>) that is used by clients, meeting planners, and guests to learn about the environmental policy from towel linen re-use, water conservation efforts, waste management, paper reduction and recycling, and

corporate social responsibility towards leveraging the community.

#### THE POWER OF PARTICIPATORY MANAGEMENT AND INCLUSION

As noted above, the adoption of a sustainable culture started with an email and memos sent requesting associate participation and ideas to promote and portray green initiatives. A young lady at the Front Desk then took it upon herself to sketch a green mascot as an ambassador of the green culture. Moreover, another email was sent following the birth of the "green mascot" to announce the "Name Contest" whereby associates were encouraged to name the new mascot. The associate suggesting the most creative name was going to win a prize! When a young man from the Front Services - Bellstand came up with the idea of reversing the name Rosen to Nesor, the name was adopted and total immersion had begun. The new culture was given birth not by one person, but by the collaborative efforts of many. It took off from that point; associates felt involved, valued and prized. It has allowed associates to be in unison with the idea of recycling, implementing a towel and linen reuse policy, and switching off lights in empty rooms - all of which became viewed as a congratulatory mission.

The power of participative management by the Engineering Department and Human Resources was effective as they continued to strongly advocate for all departments' heads to be responsible for training the associates. The Two Palms certification, a designation awarded to Rosen Shingle Creek, Rosen Centre and Rosen Plaza through the Florida State Department of Environmental Protection' Green Lodging Program recognized outstanding sustainable efforts and the turnaround of culture into a new dimension. The Environmental Steward Award within Rosen Hotels was created to honor associates who exemplified a responsible citizen of the planet by going above and beyond to implement the green culture. It is an accolade for associates who, as described by Ms. Dee Dee Baggit, "are visibly active in implementing our green initiatives and those who have created innovative ideas that are being applied within Rosen Hotels" When the engineers were asked if Rosen Hotels is raising the green standard and enforcing its green initiatives as a "marketing device", Mr. Chuck Barrett amicably replied, "this was initiated by a genuine concern to preserve the environment" (Interview with D. Baggit and C. Barrett, 2009).

The new green culture at Rosen Hotels was taken over by enthusiasm by an empowered management team as well as line associates. The management team took off with determination and commitment through conducting pre-shift discussions, providing their associates with empty boxes for recycling purposes and ensuring that paper was no longer thrown in the trash can. This was also reinforced corporate-wide using cafeteria posters and memos as vehicles of consistent and constant communication. The Cafeteria changed its interior décor and highlighted banners and posters that reflected recycling as a new way of life. The trash cans in the cafeteria were changed from one bin

to separate bins for general trash plastics, and aluminum cans etc. When someone threw items in the wrong trash can or bin they often either sighed, exclaimed self annoyance, or tried to retrieve the items! Moreover, even though the mind was conscious of the right thing to do, habits reflected in actions were harder to break and consequently reinforcement for endorsing the green culture was necessary.

The green survey conducted in 2009 reflected that as much as it was difficult to change "people and their habits" the percentage of associates among those interviewed who continued their new habits outside the workplace into their homes was impressively high. This reflects the sustainable culture adopted by Rosen Hotels was not restricted to its corporate walls, as awareness and sensitivity to the vulnerability of the environment trickled into the community. A new culture exploring how society may reduce its negative impact beyond the workplace emerged as the dialogue among associates began to include the new vocabulary and a new zeal for "environmental health" (Interview with D. Baggit and C. Barrett, 2009). When asked "Which other place would you like to see green initiatives taken seriously?" the highest percentage response was "Transportation" followed by "Home" (Survey, 2009). This portrays that even though people were not actively involved in alleviating pollution or supporting the environment they were aware of the harm taking place and still possessed a nonchalant attitude towards its effects.

Departments could create green trivia to ensure associates were knowledgeable about what was going on and if the Engineering Task Force required improvements from each department head and held them accountable for lapses. The Human Resources at Rosen Hotels is critical as it leverages associates by offering transportation needs such as arranging car-pooling and providing low cost payroll deduction shuttles services for associates without cars, and offering 10 hour four-day work weeks. The department also manages the Community Outreach program which focuses on helping those in need, as well as administering college tuition assistance offered to long-term associate families.

### **Rosen Hotels and Its "Wellness and Healthcare"**

Sustainability initiatives within Rosen Hotels go beyond ecological initiatives by embracing an untapped attribute towards development of the "wellness and healthcare" dimension. The knowledge behind healing environmental degradation fits well with the understanding that associates need to be kept healthy to ensure that they will nurture the very environment they have committed to preserve. In 1991, when Rosen Hotels first opened its internal Medical Clinic, it was not a popular move as it was received with discontentment and abrasiveness. Little was it then known this would be a strategic move to be admired and adopted by other businesses, but also provided leverage to healthier and health-conscious associates. Rosen Hotels and its founder Mr. Harris Rosen have provided healthcare, which has

changed the lives and lifestyles of their associates, their families, and the community.

Specific examples include the Wellness Coordinator walking into teach the Sales Department for Stretchy Thursday, associates receiving nutritional facts through the Fitness Friday tip, associates are reminded of Weight Watchers on Fridays at noon. Associates are encouraged to volunteer for AIDS Walk, Heart Week and take part in Zumba, Thai Chai Classes as well as join the Gold's Gym at the Rosen Hotels Associates' Discount. Mr. Rosen created the Rosen Perfect Pizza as part of the city's school menu to 53 Orange County Schools to fight obesity in the community as well as providing the "Fit Deputy Program" for Orange County Sheriff's Office. When Rosen Hotels opened its doors to the new location for its "Rosen Medical Center A Place for Healing and Wellness" in January 2012, it has emphasized its pursuit for healthy associates and community.

The "wellness and healthcare" attribute is a new construct that was discovered to be a significant factor for sustainable development within Rosen Hotels. The inclusion of this newly found attribute to sustainability acknowledges its fruits of longevity, healthier associates, and sustainable community. A healthier associate can contribute successfully not only to the employer, but to the family as well. The correlation of a healthier lifestyle to efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability calls for further research. For example, the Cafeteria has become the focal point for informing and transforming associates attitudes towards wellness and healthcare. Rosen Hotels removed unhealthy, greasy foods such as fries from the menu and replaced it with healthier choices such as baked potatoes, salad choices, and a variety of other health oriented entrées. In addition there is an herbal garden that the Chef grows and nurtures as part of the ingredients for the meals served. Posters encouraging healthy lifestyles were combined with information displaying sugar content to demonstrate an effective and strong communication method to associates by creating awareness of nutritional intake. Rosen Hotels has also placed a Blood Pressure (BP) Monitoring Machine in the cafeteria to give associates an opportunity to actively monitor their own health.

The sub-title, "ROSEN HOTELS AND ITS WELLNESS AND HEALTHCARE" draws attention and curiosity on how hospitality and healthcare can merge under one entity; yet Rosen Hotels has uncovered, shaped and contributed to its associates' welfare. Rosen Hotels goes beyond the conventional benefits of providing healthcare insurance and 401(K) retirement plans by providing a state of the art "Rosen Medical Center - A Place of Healing and Wellness". Its upscale patient rooms, advanced technology, doctors' offices, fitness center, and two additional unconventional staff members (a Wellness and Fitness Coordinator and a Dietician) speaks about the quality of healthcare it seeks for its associates. The existence of a successful and comprehensive health system within a hospitality entity is resonated through a

lifestyle to participate in the “Greatest Mover”, “Weightwatchers Program”, Zumba and Pilates classes. The wellness and fitness program has provided associates with access to a new purpose and a healthier livelihood. The overall impact of implementing one of the basic needs of life (i.e., healthcare) portrays the significance of not only the need of associates as means of production, but as part and parcel of the very existence of the organization. Mr. Harris Rosen, the President and Founder of Rosen Hotels is often heard saying “a commitment to quality starts with a commitment to the people who will be pulling it off.”

Rosen Hotels’ associates thrive when the environment provides the resources and tools to achieve effective results. One of Rosen Hotels’ ten pillars highlights the critical need to “treat others the way one would want to be treated” as one of the basic tenets to its success in gaining repeat guests and loyal associates who are respected regardless of position. The recognition, the support, and the participative approach have helped Rosen associates to embrace sustainable efforts from the “green initiatives” to the new and untapped attribute of “wellness and healthcare”. It is important to note that without caring for the associates, their environment and their wellbeing, it would be futile to impose new strategies as the community host will resent, dismiss, and to some extent, ignore with retribution. It is evident that Rosen Hotels’ sustainability efforts are attainable through a collective approach hence any paradigm shift is realistic when inclusion is part of the process.

Rosen Hotels has explored the environmental practices from energy conservation program, which consists of energy management system, load shedding, lamp reduction energy star rated equipment, and high energy efficient fluorescent and LED lighting. The Water Conservation program includes xeriscaping, irrigation and reclaimed water for landscape and turf, automatic and low flow faucets to the towel-linen reuse practices. The Waste Management program is distinctive with an increasing diversion percentage through effective practices. The Waste Management includes converting used cooking oil to biodiesel, which is used in golf maintenance equipment, recycling glass, plastic, aluminum, office paper, newspaper and cardboard. The Rosen Hotels brand is synonymous with the community brand, which highlights its commitment to a high-level corporate social responsibility with major projects that includes turning around an impoverished Tangelo Park community, building the Hospitality Management Campus for University of Central Florida.

## Discussions

This case study highlights that sustainability is no longer an abstract or ideology in its “embryonic status”. Rosen Hotels’ investment and immersion in human development, inclusiveness from developing the sustainability practices and enabling the associates together with their families to gain access to a comprehensive health plan is an emblem model for other corporations to enhance sustainable devel-

opment. The basics of the co-existence of the environment with man as its main keeper resonates strongly with the fact that man ought to recognize part of his duty is to preserve the environment and its keeper. Whereas it could be true that those who have pioneered or embraced “shallow environmentalism” in the hopes of satisfying the emergent “green consumer” can be deemed a marketing stunt when they do not implement the practices they disclose or sell as part of their culture. It may also be false to wrap up this ideal on all who could be pursuing this as “genuine environmentalists” with the purpose to do the “right thing”.

Rosen Hotels has moved beyond labor relations to achieve productivity as a meaningful reinforcement of individual achievement, growth and personal development. Participative management as a measure of inclusiveness, engagement and empowerment became a motivational tool to achieve a collective vision. The need to move from a “techno-centric” view of managing the environment is an unprecedented course of action towards practicing sustainable development to preserve the environment, safeguard human resources, and produce eco-friendly products and services for the hospitality industry.

The paradigm shift as explained by Gladwin et al. (1995) is an underlying problem and takes a longer period to take effect and have society adapt to a new ideals and methods. Gladwin et al. (1995, p. 884) further describe the new call for “worldview to be congruent with sustainable development it must manifest inclusiveness, connectivity, equity, prudence, and security”, in which case the Rosen Hotels’ Engineering and Human Resources Team has practiced in introducing the green initiatives that echoes the views of Gladwin et al. (1995). After exploring all the areas and aspects that are sustainable within Rosen Hotels and discovering new and practical constructs, this study offers a new definition of sustainability for the hotel industry. It is the propagation of the ecological product and service, with the assurance of society’s benefit, economical leverage, safeguard of the human resources and preservation of the community’s wellness and health.

The human resources dimension is demonstrated through active green policies and initiatives from the conception of the Green Team, the role of top management and injection of a participative approach to engage associates as a proven factor within Rosen Hotels. The green initiatives were strengthened by the foundation of involving associates from the beginning. As reinforced by Reynolds (2013, p. 10), “Commitment from the highest levels within an organization is a strong internal political force that can and does foster corporate environmentalism”, as he explored this dimension with comparative properties such as IHG, Hilton, and Accor that have had “powerful CEO’s with strong environmental strategies that have been driven through all levels of their companies” (Reynolds, 2013, p. 10). The healthcare and wellness attribute is a rare and remarkable dimension within Rosen Hotels, which promotes work/life balance (Jones et al.,

2013). This new dimension underpins sustainability goes beyond the traditional conceptualization to embrace total sustainability.

## Discussion Questions

- How did Rosen Hotels initiate and implement their sustainability initiatives?
- What type of constraints and challenges did Rosen Hotels face in implementing their sustainability initiatives and how did they overcome them?
- What has been the role of Human Resources and senior executives in initiating and implementing the sustainability efforts at Rosen Hotels?
- How did Rosen Hotels introduce “Human Resources” and “Wellness and Healthcare collaborative” initiatives as part of their sustainability efforts?
- Is sustainability still a hypothetical issue and how does the case study of Rosen Hotels help us embrace it as a developing and acceptable practice that needs to be implemented rather than desired?
- What can we learn from this case study?

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