

Earth Day Redefined

Sustaining change 365 days
a year

Creating and managing
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Earth Day Redefined: Sustaining change 365 days a year

by Tom Zara

Birthdays, anniversaries, moments of great historical importance, holidays, deadlines and countless personal events rightfully warrant a place in our busy life calendars. Unequivocally, we need to mark our passage of time with stop signs to remind us of these moments in our brief human history when we need a spell of introspection and appreciation. Thank you Hallmark for helping us to officially celebrate one day in homage of affection and love. Thank you founding fathers for creating a national day of Independence to celebrate the birth of a nation and the cradle of modern democracy. Thank you Pope Gregory XIII for establishing the correct date for the Winter Solace on December 22nd. It is probably fair to assume that every day of the year is dedicated to something either profound and noteworthy or obscure and insignificant. Yet we know not all days are created equally. Some are more poignant in shaping our national identity and others are personal records of the lives we have chosen.

This week we note another calendar event...
Earth Day!

The Earth gets a whole day of our undivided attention: A moment to reflect on how much we cherish this blue planet. No doubt some of us will extend a nod to the utter majesty of nature, the incalculable diversity of life forms that shape our environment, and whisper our unabashed affection for the riches of joy that the Earth bestows since the beginning of human existence. A day to capture all that the Earth was is and will become: A *Reader's Digest* celebration of extraordinary achievements.

Earth Day is a testament of our capacity to move through life in bits and bites. Our attention deficit society where we measure loyalty and commitment by clicks and 140 character chats has again wielded profound influence on matters of grave importance. We are only human. And we are creatures of habit, even when self-destructive. We have now evolved into a society of unconscious convenience, moving at a speed that ignores civility, corrupts language, proliferates behaviors of indifference and invests 24 hours in honor of Earth.

This Earth is not a calendar date for sentimentality. The Earth is our womb, a place where we exist every breathing moment of our lives. The thought that we acknowledge Earth one day a year is preposterous. We seem to accept 364 days of unconscious appreciation for Earth and only once do we have an intentional act or thought about her. I sense a misplaced balance of priorities. What are we thinking about for 364 days that is more important than the life source of Earth? There are many important things that fill our time and days and I don't discount their relevance but without Earth, everything else is kind of insignificant.

How we invest the unallocated ledger of 364 days will write the course of mankind. April 22 isn't just Earth Day: Everyday is Earth Day. We need to be awakened to live more conscientiously and orient our behavior and values around consequences, not actions. Thoughtful examination in a conscious state will arbitrate all the

patterns of behavior that fight against the vitality and health of Earth. Think about all the things we do that harm our planet. The list is exhausting. But if we take the time to inventory our behavior and measure the impact one individual can have that cascades across homes, communities, and nations, positive change will blossom.

Below are some thoughts on how brands can sustain change and make responsible behavior the norm and not the exception.

Across the landscape of corporations, both large and small, an awakening to the importance of citizenship is taking root in the boardrooms and main streets of America. The movement to incite organizations to be more purposeful and focused on "doing good" is increasing with delightful frequency. The goal of creating a corporate citizenship ethos is still an ambition, but there is an enormous reservoir of talent, passion, and opportunity to harness corporate citizenship and change the world for the better. Each of us should ask our employers how our commitment to corporate citizenship addresses the need to right the wrongs of the past and to create a bright future for generations yet to come.

With corporate citizenship, we have a formidable power to fuel positive change, but we also have the power of individual acts that can have a profound impact on the "blue marble." Over the past four years we have been studying the barriers to smart energy living, evaluating how change affects individuals. The barriers are often cited as ignorance, indifference, and an "I've done everything I can do" attitude. The truth of the matter is that these barriers

are surmountable and that the first order of action is to create an awareness of self in the context of how we live our lives. A simple yet compelling exercise is my mandate for the next 364 days. At every conscious moment of our day, look around. Ask yourself: Is there a light or device that is "on" that can be turned "off"? Can I do with less? The answer is always "yes"!

My office and my home are lit by sunlight, or bathed in a single shaft of light. As a result, I'm never drowned in a chorus of unnecessary lumination. The impact is remarkable, the sacrifice is negligible, and my self-awareness is redefined. I'm connected to my action and the consequence of those actions. Try it! You'll like it!

I'm eternally optimistic that the imagination, energy and will of humans to make this Earth a better place is achievable. I just know that it can't be done in a stupor of unconscious routine, oblivious to harmful acts of unintentional negative consequences.

My greatest fear is that Earth Day will succumb to Earth Hour that will succumb to Earth Minute and the battle will be lost. Let's not let that happen. ■

These days the company's responsibilities extend into with whom they choose to do business with, and who's in their supply chain.



Tom Zara

Tom Zara is the Global Practice Leader of Corporate Citizenship in addition to his strategy function at Interbrand New York. Given the growing importance of corporate citizenship and its contribution to brand definition and brand value, Tom now leads the development of this new practice area as an extension of his 17 years experience in managing brand strategy, corporate identity programs, name changes, and launch communications consulting.