

20 Leading Green Execs

by Amy Westervelt - 6.9.08

In business, some changes are the results of shifts in supply and demand, or new technological advances. But for a single business to have an effect on an industry, or on the world beyond that industry—that requires a visionary leader. We at *Sustainable Industries* tip our hats to some of the new “green” business leaders in five categories:

- [Entrepreneurs](#), leaders who have taken large gambles to launch “green” businesses and have since turned them into giant success stories;
- [Midsize Movers](#), leaders in the finance, investment and consulting realm who are putting money and management know-how to work for new ideas;
- [Corporate Kingpins](#), leaders within larger corporations striving to broker economy-wide change;
- [Advocates](#), leaders who work to draft and change policy and public opinion in favor of a “green” economy; and
- [Visionaries](#), leaders whose passion for environmental innovation and responsible business has inspired their industries to reach new heights.

The Entrepreneurs



Janie Young and Virginia Lowe » Founders

Yolo Colorhouse » Portland

Janie Young and Virginia Lowe’s creativity and a unique blend of commitment to environmentally sound products, beautiful color palettes and good design have helped differentiate the Yolo Colorhouse brand in the \$82 billion global paint industry. Last year, the company grew from five people to 26 people on staff and moved its manufacturing to Wisconsin, setting the stage for national distribution. [Read more](#)

Peter Liu » Founder

New Resource Bank » San Francisco

A former senior vice president at Credit Suisse First Boston and vice president at Chase Manhattan Bank, Liu and a deep roster of Bay Area shareholders founded New Resource Bank in September 2006. Among the bank’s offerings are solar power financing packages for homeowners and financial incentives for green building developers. The bank doubled its assets to \$50 million within its first six months.

Kathleen O’Brien » President

O’Brien & Co. » Seattle

A nationally recognized expert in the field of sustainable design, construction and development,

Kathleen O'Brien has been instrumental in developing green building programs that have certified more than 6,000 homes. O'Brien is a prolific author with numerous educational texts to her name, including the recently released "Northwest Green Home Primer."

Brian Rohter » CEO

New Seasons Market » Portland

Brian Rohter and his wife Eileen Brady co-founded New Seasons Market in 1999 with a handful of other local food business families. Since then, Rohter has led the market to open nine new stores and launch an online shopping and delivery service, all while maintaining its commitment to regional food systems. New Seasons plans to open its 10th store in 2009.

The Midsize Movers



David Williams » CEO »

ShoreBank Pacific » Ilwaco, Wash.

David Williams never imagined that he'd be running a community-focused bank in the town his ancestors founded several generations ago. But when ShoreBank Pacific tapped him in 2000 to take over the bank, headquartered in Ilwaco, Wash., he agreed, eager to fully develop the bank's sustainability strategy. With Williams at the helm, the bank's assets grew from \$10 million in 2000 to \$155 million in 2006, and its loans grew from \$2 million to \$166 million in the same time frame, according to Williams. [Read more](#)

Lois Gordon » President

Ecos Consulting » Portland

Over the past decade Gordon has turned Ecos into the go-to consulting firm for West Coast businesses seeking to make a shift towards sustainability. In addition to traditional corporations, Gordon has worked with utilities throughout the West Coast to focus on energy efficiency and renewable energy generation. In 2007 Gordon led the formation of Ecos' Climate Solutions division, created to help companies navigate the emergent North American carbon markets.

John Rockwell » Managing Director

Element Partners » Menlo Park, Calif.

Rockwell has been investing in energy technologies for longer and more successfully than most of the VC community. At Element Partners (formerly DFJ Element), he has led his team to raise some of the largest cleantech funds in the industry. In 1996, Rockwell was a partner at Advent International Corp., where he managed the firm's California office and participated in the direct investment activities of both Advent's EnviroTech and Advent Energy II funds—some of the most successful clean energy venture funds to date.

Steve Straus » CEO/President

Glumac » Portland

Straus led his West Coast engineering firm's shift to focus solely on green building, and credits that shift with the company's phenomenal growth over the past several years. Glumac's staff has grown by 39 percent since 2001, when the company began focusing on green buildings. Although Glumac has 19 LEED-certified projects under its belt, including the Platinum-rated Gerding Theater at the Armory in Portland, and 33 LEED-registered projects in process, Straus is passionate about taking green building beyond LEED's 17 energy-related credits.

The Corporate Kingpin



Peter Darbee » CEO

PG&E » San Francisco

It's not terribly often that a Republican investment banker becomes an advocate for the environment. But, since taking the helm of Pacific Gas & Electric Co. (NYSE: PGC) in 2005, CEO Peter Darbee has shocked environmentalists and analysts alike by rising the occasion and making PG&E not only profitable—with an average 7 percent year-on-year growth in earnings—but also an environmental leader with substantial investments in renewable energy sources, energy-efficiency initiatives and green-collar job training. [Read more](#)

Carl Bass » CEO

Autodesk » San Rafael, Calif.

Leading the charge to integrate advanced building information modeling (BIM) capabilities and LEED criteria into the software most of the world's architects and engineers use, Bass is helping to increase the uptake of green building practices by providing a simple software tool that makes it easier.

Bonnie Nixon-Gardiner » Global Program Manager » Supply Chain Social & Environmental Responsibility

Hewlett-Packard » Palo Alto, Calif.

Nixon-Gardiner deserves credit for being the main voice that spurred high-tech giants to police the global supply chain. She helped to draft and promote the Electronic Industry Code of Conduct and has been a tireless champion for transparency and responsibility in the supply chain for several years.

Ash Awad » Vice President of Energy Services

McKinstry » Seattle

Awad is a key advocate for increasing energy-efficiency in the Northwest, and Seattle in particular, through his role as president of the board for the Northwest Energy Efficiency Council. At McKinstry, the leading mechanical construction and engineering firm in the Pacific Northwest, Awad's focus has created 75 to 100 jobs installing energy-efficient equipment annually.

The Advocates



Greg Nickels » Mayor

Seattle

When Seattle Mayor Greg Nickels took office in 2002, climate change was a backburner issue, but a warm winter that thwarted skiers showed Nickels the light, and he encouraged the nation's mayors to sign on to the Kyoto Protocol. Although there was some push-back against Mayor Nickels' plan initially—particularly when he increased parking fees early on to encourage transit use—he says Seattle residents now largely back environmental initiatives. And Nickels' leadership has also helped brand Seattle, which he says has been good for business. [Read more](#)

Scott Exo » Executive Director

Food Alliance » Portland

Scott Exo helped transform Food Alliance from a poorly funded farm and ranch certifier into a successful and growing certifier of food processors and food service companies. Since shifting its focus in 2005, the organization has taken its program national through a partnership with International Certification

Services (ICS), opened a California office, introduced a handful of new certification programs and certified the country's first sustainable meat processor.

Dr. Jan Hamrin » President

Center for Resource Solutions » San Francisco

Honored by the California Energy Commission in 2007 for her role in shaping state, national and international renewable energy markets, Dr. Hamrin has worked for 25 years to promote renewable energy. She served from 1979 to 1980 as the manager of Solar Programs for the California Energy Commission, was the founder and executive director of the Independent Energy Producers Association in the 1980s (through which she facilitated contract negotiations between renewable generators and California's investor-owned utilities), founded CRS in 1997 and was instrumental in developing the Green-e Renewable Energy Certification Program.

Van Jones » Executive Director

Ella Baker Center » Oakland

As executive director of the Oakland-based Ella Baker Center for Human Rights, Jones has become a national champion for green-collar job training. He led the center's recent successful funding efforts, securing a \$250,000 grant to develop green-collar job training in Oakland and continues to be a highly visible and vocal advocate for the creation and support of green-collar jobs.

The Visionaries



Dennis Wilde » Principal

Gerding Edlen Development Co. » Portland

Perhaps best known as "the green guy" at Gerding Edlen, Dennis Wilde has been instrumental in pushing the green building envelope on the West Coast. Although he has been an essential part of some of Gerding Edlen's most far-reaching green building projects, Wilde eschews any responsibility for the company's focus on green development. But Wilde's charisma and commitment have carried the firm far beyond a few successful green building projects, driving it to the forefront of the West Coast's green building revolution. [Read more](#)

Yvon Chouinard » Founder

Patagonia » Ventura, Calif.

Yvon Chouinard has been out in front on sustainability for the apparel industry for decades. An avid mountain climber and outdoorsman, Chouinard has integrated environmental responsibility into every aspect of Patagonia's operations, and recently made a huge effort to track the impact of its supply chain. In addition to leading by example, Chouinard has advised countless policy makers and corporate leaders on the integration of sustainability and business.

Dan Freeman » Founder

Dr. Dan's Biodiesel » Seattle

Dan Freeman was convinced in the 1990s by Puget Sound Clean Cities to consider biodiesel, and wound up selling it to the Washington State Ferries. Since then Freeman has grown his business to supply much of Washington with biodiesel from locally-grown feedstocks. Washington state has the highest concentration of biodiesel users in the country, a fact that is largely credited to Freeman, his biodiesel and his popular Biodiesel 101 course.

Jonathan Greenblatt » CEO

GOOD magazine » West Hollywood, Calif.

Newly announced CEO of GOOD magazine Jonathan Greenblatt in 2002 launched Ethos, one of the fastest growing U.S. bottled water brands, with the idea that a portion of profits is donated to improving access to fresh water in the developing world. In 2003, he sold the company to Starbucks (Nasdaq: SBUX); through a partnership with PepsiCo (NYSE: PEP), the company aims to increase its distribution to 100,000 locations by 2010. He currently serves as a senior advisor to the United Nations Foundation where he helped launch the Global Water Challenge.