

SPOTLIGHT

The Green Economy and Emerging Chief Sustainability Officer role



Dawn E. Dzurilla, Founder and Managing Partner of Gaia Human Capital Consultants, recently sat down with Hunt Scanlon Media to discuss the green economy and the emerging role of Chief Sustainability Officer.

Following are excerpts from that discussion.

Describe the green economy. Why do we need it and how do we work towards it?

The green economy will have a crucial role in securing geopolitical harmony, alleviate the specter of abrupt climate change and global warming, transform global economies, and reposition the world's future energy portfolio. Many technological, financial, and legislative advancements must be realized before the green economy can fulfill its true potential.

Are companies already adapting? In which way?

More than ever before, fueled by a strong desire to achieve a more just, inclusive world and aspirational and passionate 'triple bottom-line,' professionals from all walks of life are working diligently to develop a diverse and rich culture which defines actions and responsibilities that are environmentally sustainable, economically sustainable & DE&I socially responsible. Savvy green economy companies are increasingly stepping up, adapting sustainability agendas to the shifts in consumer demand and seeking creative opportunities to integrate sustainability across core business operations and instilling ESG as an integral piece of the organization's strategic and operating culture.

Discuss the emerging role of the chief sustainability officer.

At their core, every chief sustainability officer acknowledges that to visualize, execute and affect change and to bring about creativity and innovation at scale, they cannot do it alone. To be successful, CSOs must have the ability to lead, not necessarily by managing huge staffs, but rather through their talent to influence. Their dynamic influence, skills and unabashed sustainability values, matched with business perspective, must essentially be felt throughout the entire organization from the board, CEO, CXO, down to every divisional leader at their company, and well beyond the confines of their company to include community groups, policy makers, NGOs, special interests and other stakeholders.

What do you look for when recruiting a CSO?

Gaia Human Capital Consultants and our clients tend to desire a number of requirements in CSO and senior sustainability candidates, including leaders with strong personal, interpersonal and visionary leadership competencies – in other words, leaders who are seasoned, thoughtful and resourceful with proven abilities in assisting in the development and execution of plans to address ESG and environmental sustainability, while upholding the values and vision of their past organization.

How does the chief sustainability officer impact culture?

More than ever before, people of all generations and cultures want an opportunity to obtain a high level of personal fulfillment, aligning their values and authentic selves with their work and career selves. Consequently, countless organizations continue to attempt to attract talent at all levels, including executives, by expressing their sustainability, ESG and DE&I employment brand. When you consider the diversity of social, environmental, governance, cultural and economic dimensions to sustainability and ESG, it is clear that CSOs are some of the most credible architects, orchestra leaders and evangelists, not only idealizing the pillars of a sustainable business but in creating significant, meaningful value – across the shareholder, customer and employee chain. With their integrity, passion, and tenacity, CSOs inspire accountability and resourcefully host meaningful, measurable core values.

How does politics impact the broad ESG sector? And, Dawn, what impact will the Biden/Harris Administration have on the future of clean tech and sustainability?

Simply put, President Biden and Vice President Harris and their Administration 'get it.' The President's vision of an infrastructure bill alone would greatly invest in well-paying green jobs in renewable energy – professional careers in virtually every discipline – as we reignite our aspirations toward a de-carbonized and more sustainable society and planet, present and future. Regarding renewable energy, the current U.S. Administration acknowledges that we need 'all of the above,' understanding that fossil fuels are transitional – we will still need them and we are not quite ready yet to abandon them. Innovation and adoption of technologies, encouraged by the President, will continue creating vast wealth in the U.S. and increase America's competitive position in every aspect of the economy. Furthermore, the political framework of federal, state, local governments, and policy makers working in partnership with NGOs, leading scientific and engineering institutions, corporates, entrepreneurs, and investors is much welcomed news.

There are several reasons why we must seek sustainable solutions including, addressing climate change, public health and safety, energy independence, avoiding geopolitical conflict, energy reliability and resilience, clean air, water and food quality, infrastructure rebuilding, wealth creation, jobs and economic benefits, engineering innovation and STEM educational values and, many more. It is a full plate!

Discuss why private equity firms have an increasing interest in the cleantech and sustainability industry. Why should they focus on this sector going forward?

Sustainability is an important factor during due diligence and should remain a key component of the long-term strategic relationship with PE firms and their portfolio companies during scale-up through commercialization to post investment.

I strongly propose that every private equity firm that invests in clean tech, climate tech, and ESG impact companies should, if they can afford it financially, recruit an in-house (at the operating level) director of sustainability or ESG sustainability leader. This sustainability executive essentially partners with stakeholders across the entire PE portfolio and with executive leadership teams in creating and adopting sustainability and ESG practices. For more information:

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