

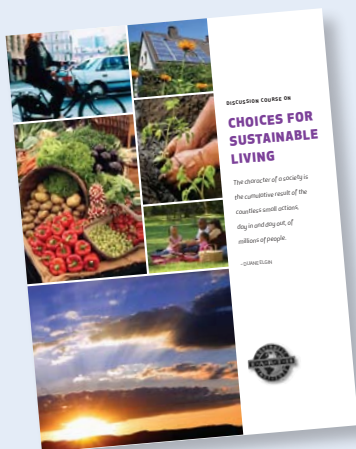


EarthMatters Salon Series

Active, personally relevant learning is at the heart of an effective education. This salon series takes participants through a process of exploring sustainability through shared discovery and personal reflection designed to help shape the way we think and act.

From Choices for Sustainable Living: Excerpt from “Why Bother?” by Michael Pollan

Whatever we can do as individuals to change the way we live at this suddenly very late date does seem utterly inadequate to the challenge. Yet for us to wait for legislation or technology to solve the problem of how we’re living our lives suggests we’re not serious about changing — something our politicians cannot fail to notice. They will not move until we do. Indeed, to look to leaders and experts, to laws and money and grand schemes to save us from our predicament represents precisely the sort of thinking — passive, delegated, dependent for solutions on specialists — that helped get us into this mess in the first place.



Read more in
Choices for Sustainable Living

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Pollan writes: “If you bother, you will set an example for other people.” Whose example has inspired you?
2. Is a “Why Bother?” about sustainability attitude prevalent in your workplace? Thoughts on how we might foster an “I can and I will” attitude?
3. Do individual virtuous acts seem irrelevant to you? Why?

From Choices for Sustainable Living: Excerpt from *The Extravagant Gesture*, by William McDonough and Michael Braungart

How is it possible for industry and nature to fruitfully coexist? Well, consider the cherry tree: each spring it produces thousands of blossoms, only a few of which germinate, take root, and grow. Who could see cherry blossoms piling up on the ground and think, “How inefficient and wasteful?” The tree’s abundance is useful and safe. After falling to the ground, the blossoms return to the soil and become nutrients for the surrounding environment. Every last particle contributes in some way to the health of a thriving ecosystem. Waste that stays waste does not exist. Instead, waste nourishes; waste equals food.

As a cherry tree grows, it enriches far more than the soil. Through photosynthesis it makes food from the

continued on back

A FEW POTENTIAL APPLICATIONS

- To introduce staff or students to one another through small group dialogue.
- As an interactive way to engage employees or students in a conversation around their personal connection to sustainability.
- As part of new student orientation.

USING THIS TOOL

Read the excerpt below, and then form groups of 3-5 people, and go through the discussion questions for about 10 minutes. For the next reading/questions, create new groups if numbers warrant it.

During your discussion keep in mind these helpful tenets: Avoid judgment of others. Agreement isn’t necessary for effective dialog.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR FACULTY, STAFF AND STUDENTS

- Discussion based curricula — Please visit the NW Earth Institute website at www.nwei.org.
- NWEI’s Annual EcoChallenge focused on adopting new behaviors, www.ecochallenge.org



sun, providing nourishment for animals, birds and microorganisms. It sequesters carbon, produces oxygen and filters water. The tree's limbs and leaves harbor a great diversity of microbes and insects, all of which play a role within a local system of natural cycles. Even in death the tree provides nourishment as it decomposes and releases minerals that fuel new life. From blossom to sapling to magnificent old age, the cherry tree's growth is regenerative. We could say its life cycle is cradle to cradle — after each useful life it provides nourishment for something new. In a cradle to cradle world — a world of

natural cycles powered by the sun — growth is good, wastes nutritious, and nature's diverse responses to place are the source of intelligent design.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What are some feasible ways of achieving a cradle to cradle system at your university?
2. What hurdles do you think we need to overcome to develop a cradle-to-cradle mindset?
3. What are some encouraging examples you see right now?

From *Sustainable Systems at Work*: Excerpt from *The Necessary Revolution* (2008) by Peter Senge, Bryan Smith, Nina Kruschwitz, Joe Laur and Sara Schley

Just as our way of thinking got us into the situation we are in today, so, too, will our thinking differently help us find our way out. We can't attack the problems piecemeal. Solving isolated social and environmental problems will not get us very far; at best it will provide short-term relief. Neither will preserve the status quo while imagining naively that new technologies alone will somehow save the day.

We need to ask, "What would a new way of thinking, a way of living, and ultimately an economic system look like that worked based on the principles of the larger natural world? And how do we create such a way of living in our organizations and societies, one step at a time?"

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. According to the authors, it is naïve to think that "new technologies alone will somehow save the day." In your opinion, what role will technology play in the transition to a more sustainable society?
2. How would you answer the question: "what would a new way of thinking, a way of living, and ultimately an economic system look like that worked based on the principles of the larger natural world?"
3. What is the first step toward this vision at your university?