

Climate Change and its Impact on the Workplace

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For many, Climate Change, AKA, Global Warming, is a real issue that will have severe, global repercussions. The UN’s participating nations have been meeting almost annually with agreements being reached with:

1988: the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change;

1992: the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change;

1997: the Kyoto Protocol;

2016: the Paris Accord;

2021: the COP 26 conference in Glasgow Scotland.

By and large, global observers and Climate Change scientists have consistently labeled these efforts as inadequate – as the media reported severe wild fires, droughts and floods. And today, Tipping Points, those points in time when ecological damage is irreversible, are being predicted now and in the next one to three decades.

Unfortunately, Climate Change is not an isolated phenomenon since it can be thrown onto the unresolved, international heap of issues like wars, pandemics, economic interruptions, poverty, famine, etc.

Alberta seems to be Canada’s industrial epicenter for Climate Change with the downturns in its oil industry. Before covid-19 hit the country, reversals in Alberta’s oil industry caused its economy to decline with unemployment rising, increased mortgage forfeitures, rising crime rates, social malaise, increased mental health demands, higher suicide rates and increased addictions. Then, 2021 saw British Columbia battered by killer heat,

droughts, wildfires, floods and recent freezing – not the west coast image we grew up with.

Climate Change is now considered a real or perceived crisis that will become incrementally critical in the foreseeable future with international effects on economies, politics, social institutions and individuals. However, as the effects are felt, employers and employees will have something onerous to deal with.

Some rules for employers over the next decades:

- a) Keep a sharp eye on the changing environment. The changes will accelerate.
- b) Cultivate reliable sources of information. The confusion with the public and social media is systemic, and it will inevitably get worse and the need for fact checking will subsequently increase.
- c) Ensure a very careful balance of the need to survive as a prospering organization with treating employees well to maintain a stable and productive workforce.
- d) Be transparent with employees. As employees get fearful and stressed, they will turn to those they can trust. When that trust is gone, so will they.
- e) Provide leadership that will support employees as they become more and more skittish. Understand their stresses, listen to them, facilitate their new training.
- f) Be prepared to pivot the organization. Rein in financial commitments. Engage in short term strategic planning because the horizons will become closer and the future less predictable as different crises unfold.

On the other hand, employees should strive to:

- a) Monitor the effects of Climate Change and its economic effects very closely.
- b) Learn to live with accelerating changes in the workplace and society in general.

- c) Cultivate the ability to be flexible. Learn to live with uncertainty.
- d) Be extremely cautious with buying into beliefs. Opinions are better when one must adapt to new changes.
- e) Be prepared to solicit new training and remain wide open to training opportunities.
- f) Gauge the employer's ability to offer future employment
- g) Control personal finances by reducing financial commitments. Going into unemployment with over extended debts will be painful and destructive.
- h) Recognize the stress levels in oneself, co-workers, family and friends. Cultivate support networks.
- i) Prepare your children with analytical skills, flexibility and the value of ongoing lifelong learning. The learning will be critically needed as jobs and circumstances change.
- j) Sharpen job seeking techniques. A recent Google search on "Best jobs for a Green Economy" yielded about 571,000,000 results in 0.67 of a second. There will be a variety of new jobs emerging in the market place.

In the workplace, the issue of mental health has become one of the big elephants in the corporate world. The epidemic of work-related stress, depression and anxiety seems to be continuously getting worse. In 2017-2018, stress, depression and anxiety in the UK accounted for more than half (57%) of total working days lost due to ill health. (from "The Great Reset", by Klaus Swab et Al., 2020). That survey could be replicated in Canada and the survey occurred at a time that will soon qualify as "the good ol' days".

Coping with Climate Change and all the other issues need not lead to despair if one deliberately works at nurturing and maintaining hope, which ... is a whole other story.

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