

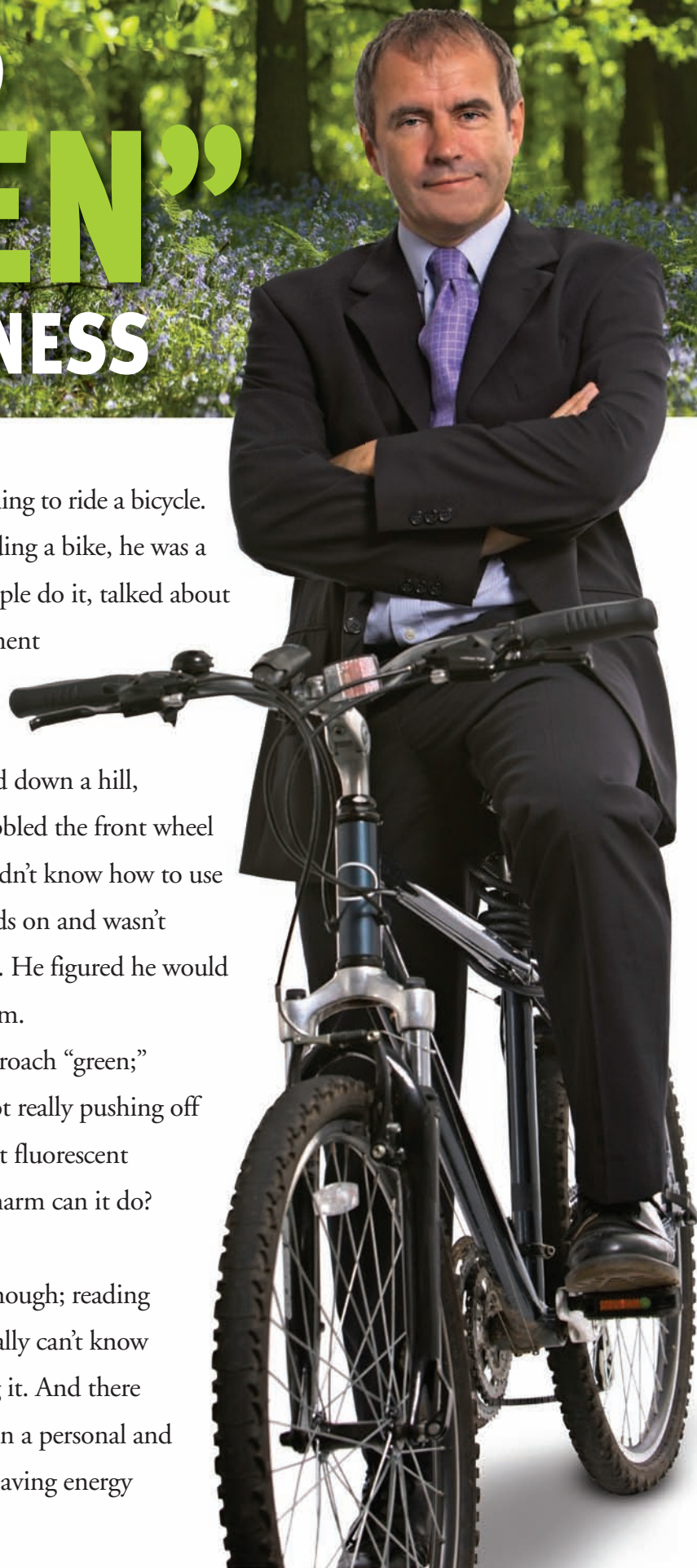
# HOW TO “GREEN” YOUR BUSINESS

*By Susan Meredith*

**C**onverting to “green” is a lot like learning to ride a bicycle. When our son Ian first started riding a bike, he was a bit reluctant. He watched other people do it, talked about it, was interested in how the equipment worked, but wasn’t so sure he was ready. An early incident didn’t help matters. Ian was just starting to feel comfortable when he sailed down a hill, careening on one training wheel while he wobbled the front wheel back and forth trying to regain control. He didn’t know how to use his brakes and eventually toppled. Ian had pads on and wasn’t physically hurt, but his confidence was shaken. He figured he would leave bikes alone and let other people ride them.

Ian’s experience is similar to how many approach “green;” watching, listening, talking, interested, but not really pushing off into it yet. Hearing about mercury in compact fluorescent lightbulbs can shake one’s confidence. What harm can it do? Should it be left for someone else to do?

The old analogy about bike riding is true though; reading about it or watching others is fine, but one really can’t know how to do it and gain the benefits until trying it. And there definitely are benefits to greening businesses on a personal and collective level, as well as organizationally — saving energy saves money.





A company that reduces the amount of paper used, reduces the amount that has to be purchased. Reducing the amount of travel and transportation, reduces travel costs. Improving the efficiency of light bulbs or turning them off when not in use, reduces the amount of electricity one has to buy.

We recently went back to the Chicago area to visit family. There were bike riders everywhere — the fit and the flabby, the wildly carefree racers, the white-haired retirees and the serious riders on their way to work. The hilly landscape in Austin, Texas, is a lot different than the flat streets of Chicago suburbia. It's different riding on gravel than pavement. The environment makes a difference.

Again, it's like making the green transition. The weather affects the appropriate solutions for greening offices and other facilities. For instance, in colder climates designs, materials and habits that encourage heat to enter the buildings are used. In warmer climates, buildings are designed to keep the heat out. In all cases, the goal is to minimize the heat unintentionally transferring in and out of the building.

The social environments make a difference on how accepted and expected a green existence is. Peer pressure makes a difference. Media coverage in an area makes a difference. Attitude is important. A gloom and doom feeling is not very inspiring. Focusing on problems and fear

freezes action. Focusing on solutions and success motivates and moves people to action.

The Chicago trip inspired Ian to venture out and around his hometown. He started out with a death grip on the handlebars and needed a push to get going. He focused on every obstacle within 20 feet, sure he was going to fall victim to it. But he kept going. He began to notice how little changes in the way he moved made big differences in how smoothly the ride went. At the end, he was riding leisurely, looking around at the dogs, the lake, the boaters, confident and proud, truly enjoying the ride. Like anything, it gets easier once one gets into motion.

Some need a push to become a green business, but find that it's fun to play the game of energy efficiency. "What if we kept the temperature one degree different — would we notice the difference and how much energy would it save? I wonder how few lights we can use? How about if we stagger work hours so employees could avoid rush hour traffic and use less gas on their commute? What if we allowed more telecommuting? How about if we used teleconferencing in place of some of our business travel? How can we reduce paper waste and other waste? I wonder how much energy we'd save if we installed motion sensors in the bathrooms?"

To really understand the impact, track the changes as business process improvement projects. Or not. Just playing the game will encourage saving and improving and making a difference.

No matter what size a business is, everyone can contribute to making a greener office environment by simply starting small. Each small movement will make everyone more comfortable with bigger steps. For instance, changing out lightbulbs, in the office or at home, is relatively simple and inexpensive to do. It's like taking that first push on the bike. Have a lightbulb smashing party for the old bulbs, signifying the company's commitment to being a green business.

Don't smash the new bulbs though! About that mercury: if a compact fluorescent bulb breaks, treat it like the mercury from those old thermometers — make sure to clean it up thoroughly. Treat broken or burned out bulbs as hazardous waste — put them in a bag and put them out with other hazardous wastes. When bringing those to the hazardous waste recycling center, bring the bulbs, too. It's really not that big a deal.

Computers generate lots of heat and provide lots of opportunities for energy savings. Make sure defaults are set to standby or hibernate when idle; screen-savers still use energy! Encourage staff members to start the habit of turning