

Thinking beyond jobs with sustainability in the title

February 23 2016, by Marivi Perdomo Caba, Earth Institute, Columbia University



MS in Sustainability Management alum James Ossman ('15)

Sustainability Management alum James Ossman ('15) approached the program searching for a new toolkit of hard skills. He was looking for a career transition into the private sector, and was interested in working for companies that had a business model that promoted sustainability. He wanted to do the job function that he knows and loves (operations) in a company that demands I take a sustainable approach to my work. James is now the Global Operations Manager at Etsy. In this role, he designs

and oversees Etsy's strategy for facilities management, health, safety, and security, and partners with departments throughout the company to help implement their programs at their international locations.

1. What is your current job and what are the responsibilities associated with your position?

I'm the Global Operations Manager at Etsy, which is a marketplace where people around the world connect, both online and offline, to make, sell and buy unique goods. In this role, I'm responsible for internal operations at our nine global offices. I design and oversee our strategy for facilities management, health, safety, and security, and I also partner with departments throughout the company to help implement their programs at our international locations. This includes things like our food program that features locally sourced lunches (called Eatsy), our community-based partnerships and employee volunteering programs, our team celebrations, and more.

On a day-to-day basis I spend a lot of time managing the global team that makes our offices creative, weird, sustainable and fun places to work. I also develop policies, tools, and systems that support Etsy's rapidly scaling physical presence and employee population.

I also wear a second hat at Etsy, serving as the co-leader of our Zero Waste task force. In this capacity I'm responsible for our efforts to increase the rate of waste diverted from landfill, and reducing the overall quantity of waste we produce.

2. Do your current job responsibilities align with the professional goals that you originally had when you began the MSSM program?

When I enrolled in the MSSM program, I didn't have a clear idea of what I wanted to get out of it. I knew I was looking for a career transition into the [private sector](#), and that I was interested in working for companies that have a business model that promotes [sustainability](#).

At some point along the way, I started to focus in on B-Corps, and the idea of working for a company that really embeds sustainability in the fabric of its DNA. I didn't want to be part of a sustainability department in a company where I would be fighting an uphill battle to convince other departments of the value of sustainable approaches, but rather, to do the job function that I know and love (operations) in a company that demands I take a [sustainable approach](#) to my work. My job at Etsy really achieves that goal 100%.

3. What inspired you to work in sustainability?

My professional life provides a huge amount of personal fulfillment for me, and because of this I really put my heart into whatever I'm doing. I need to feel connected to the mission and values I'm promoting through my work in order to stay motivated. It's also important that I can feel and see my impact. Working in sustainability keeps me connected to the environment around me and allows me to create and contribute to the world that I want to be a part of.

4. What has been your biggest challenge associated with sustainability (in your current position)?

I would say that my biggest challenge related to sustainability has been prioritizing where I focus my energy. Etsy is all about building for the long term and I'm trying to instill that value into my approach to sustainable operations. I have had to resist the urge to jump into more glamorous sustainability initiatives, because its most important that I

build a solid base of systems and processes that set us up for success down the road.

5. What has been your biggest accomplishment associated with sustainability (in your current position)?

When I started in this role, Etsy was already doing amazing things to reduce its waste and increase its diversion to landfill. This year we took the next step and established formal sustainability goals that we will be publicly announcing. I led the effort around our waste reduction targets. It was great to be able to pull together all of our awesome work to build sustainable systems and engage employees under a single strategy. Now with a clear target in sight, I've been able to focus our efforts to set us on a path to achieving our goal.

6. What skills has the MSSM program taught you that you think have proven useful to your current position?

I've used a lot of the analytical skills, such as cost benefit analysis and accounting in my current role. I also have applied many skills gained through my capstone project developing a zero waste strategy for a municipality in upstate New York.

7. What was your favorite class in the MSSM program and why?

I approached the program looking to leave with a new toolkit of hard skills. GHG reporting, economics, cost benefit analysis, decision models, GIS, and others all helped me to achieve this, and were classes I really

enjoyed. Professor Bose and Professor Dickinson were two of my favorites.

8. How do you intend to utilize your degree from the MSSM program in furthering your career?

At the moment, I'm feeling quite settled in how the MSSM program has helped to advance my career. It's great to know though, that I always have a network and the skills I gained in the program to fall back on when I'm ready for my next step.

9. What tips do you have for your fellow students who are looking for a job in sustainability?

Think beyond jobs with the word sustainability in the title. There are lots of companies out there modeled around sustainable products and services, or that hold sustainability as a core value. In companies like this, you can work in any role and sustainability will be a major part of what you do.

10. What do you think is the most beneficial aspect of the MSSM program with regard to your career?

I walked away from the program feeling more confident in my analytical skills, and well-versed in the science, theory, and language of sustainability. For me, this has been the difference between being interested in and passionate about sustainability, and being able to lead sustainability initiatives with authority.

This story is republished courtesy of Earth Institute, Columbia University: blogs.ei.columbia.edu/

Provided by Earth Institute, Columbia University

Citation: Thinking beyond jobs with sustainability in the title (2016, February 23) retrieved 24 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2016-02-jobs-sustainability-title.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.