



# THE 7 HABITS OF GREEN CONSCIOUS SINGAPOREANS

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# Introduction

“All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men do nothing.”

- Edmund Burke<sup>1</sup>

“We didn’t inherit the Earth from our parents. We have borrowed it from our children. We have all borrowed it and we are all going to hand it back.”

- Author unknown

Humans have progressed over the years in the pursuit of better lives. In the relentless quest for a better life, we have manipulated our surroundings and the environment to suit us. According to the United Nations, the human population has increased from about 3 billion to 7 billion over the past 52 years<sup>2</sup>. This increase in population has resulted in a world where more food is needed, more resources are depleted, more natural space is converted to urban housing, and more waste is generated. Forests are cleared to build our cities; rivers are converted to dams to provide electricity; oil and minerals are mined and extracted from the land.

We have better lives now, so you may ask, “What is the problem?” The problem according to the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment conducted by the United Nations is that: “Over the past 50 years, humans have changed ecosystems more rapidly and extensively than in any comparable period of time in human history, largely to meet rapidly growing demands for food, fresh water, timber, fiber and fuel. This has resulted in a substantial and largely irreversible loss in the diversity of life on Earth. The

changes that have been made to ecosystems have contributed to substantial net gains in human well-being and economic development, but these gains have been achieved at growing costs in the form of the degradation of many ecosystem services, increased risks of nonlinear changes, and the exacerbation of poverty for some groups of people. These problems, unless addressed, will substantially diminish the benefits that future generations obtain from ecosystems...”<sup>3</sup>

Everyone wants the best for ourselves and is selfish in our thinking. A civilisation that does not recognise its place in nature and the importance of benefits for all instead of a selected few, will unfortunately face extinction. Jared Diamond in his book, *Collapse*, explains how past civilisations have collapsed and become extinct due to selfish and unsustainable use of resources and destruction to their environment<sup>4</sup>.

The fate of mankind depends on whether we recognise that we are a part of nature and what we do affects the rest of nature and our own survival as a species. If we choose

to benefit ourselves over nature and disregard our harm to the environment, then we are heading towards our own destruction. What is important now is that we should not carry on as usual. As we become increasingly aware about our impacts on the environment and the problems caused, we have to take action and minimise our impacts.

Many of us lament that we do not have sufficient time to enjoy our life, let alone care about the environment. Some admit that they do know about the environmental problems, it is just that there are other more important things in life like work, family, friends and money that call for their immediate attention. In addition, some environmental problems would only occur in the future. We choose to ignore problems that do not happen in the near future or if we do not see the immediate impact on us.

Perhaps, it is time to heed the words in the David Suzuki Foundation’s Declaration of Interdependence, which says, “We are one brief generation in the long march of time; the future is not ours to erase.”<sup>5</sup> You can do something for the

environment and help to ensure that our future generations are not worst off.

If you wish to go green and take action, this book makes it easier for you. I have compiled a list of 7 habits that are commonly found in people who are green conscious and environmentally aware. All of us can start learning these 7 habits now and take action to improve and protect the environment. The 7 habits include:

Habit 1: Respect nature and renew your bond

Habit 2: Improve your environmental awareness and knowledge

Habit 3: Reduce your environmental impact

Habit 4: Spread the green message and influence others

Habit 5: Support green initiatives and groups

Habit 6: Participate as an active citizen

Habit 7: Choose to be a responsible consumer

The habits begin with first developing your “Self” by respecting and renewing your relationship with nature and its biodiversity, improving on your understanding of environmental issues and knowledge, and taking personal actions to reduce your energy and water usage, and waste disposal.

Next, move on to influence your “Family, Friends, School, Work or Group” by spreading the environmental message to others such as family members, friends and colleagues, and convincing organisations that you belong to, such as schools, companies, or social groups, to be more green.

Finally, go one step further to shape your “Community and Local Environment” through supporting green initiatives by the government and environmental groups, volunteering or joining activities organised by the groups, participating actively as a citizen to shape government policies, and choosing to be a responsible consumer who supports green businesses and products.

You can practise all the 7 habits or adopt a few habits to do something for the environment. The habits are only a guide to help you make the first move and to inspire you to do more. I hope that you understand that we are all part of this planet and each one of us has a responsibility to protect it. As Buckminster Fuller puts it: “We are not going to be able to operate our Spaceship Earth successfully nor for much longer unless we see it as a whole spaceship and our fate as common. It has to be everybody or nobody.”<sup>6</sup>

# Habit 1: Respect Nature and Renew Your Bond

“The first aim of education should not be to prepare young people for careers, but to enable them to develop a respect for life.”

- Norman Cousins<sup>7</sup>

“We cannot win this battle to save species and environments without forging an emotional bond between ourselves and nature as well – for we will not fight to save what we do not love.”

- Stephen Jay Gould<sup>8</sup>

I believe that all life are interdependent and have a right to live on this planet. Humans have evolved to a stage where we are doing harm to nature and its biodiversity. We need to improve and protect the environment so that we can live in co-existence with nature, preserving the earth as home for future generations of humans and other living beings. Habit 1 is to develop a respect for nature and renew our bond with nature and its biodiversity. Nature has much to teach us on how to live with the rest of life on Earth.

Our current civilisation has a human-centric view, where humans are at the center of the world and nature revolves around us. There is an increasingly loss of respect for nature and its biodiversity. Their only value seems to serve as food and resources for us to exploit and enjoy. There is also a trend towards individualism. We care more about ourselves and to a certain extent, our immediate family and friends. Our personal gains tend to outweigh the overall public interest.

*The Tragedy of the Commons* as pointed out by Garrett Hardin becomes inevitable if humans choose to ignore overall interests and focus on individual benefits. According to him: “Each man is locked into a system that compels him to increase his herd without limit – in a world that is limited. Ruin is the destination toward which all men rush, each pursuing his own best interest in a society that believes in the freedom of the commons.”<sup>9</sup>

As we regard ourselves as separate or superior to nature and other organisms on this planet, this human-centric view inevitably causes us to lose our bond with the rest of life on this planet. We fail to understand that we are only one species out of the millions that share this planet. Are we so unique and superior? Even if we are, that does not give us the right to disregard the rest of the biodiversity that lives together with us on this planet. Humans are actually dependent on nature – from microorganisms in our body that help us to digest food to trees that take in carbon dioxide and produce oxygen. We have to see nature and its biodiversity as coexisting with us and not below us.

The urbanisation of society has also resulted in the increase in distance (physical and mental) between humans and nature. What surround us are buildings, manmade structures or artificially created green spaces. The only animals we see frequently are domesticated pets and birds. The appreciation of nature comes only as an afterthought when it is time to relax or go for a holiday.

Why do you want to be green? You must first identify your own reasons to be concerned about the environment, be it personal or for the greater good. Without an answer, you would not be committed to take action. There are several reasons why people want to go green and protect the environment. Some do it for the sake of preserving the Earth as home for their children and future generations. Some do it to improve their current environmental or health conditions. Others do it because they respect nature and its biodiversity, which they consider as sacred and that humans have no right to destroy them.

Regardless of the answer you give, it should include a respect for life. Everyone should develop a respect for nature – the plants, trees, animals and all the biodiversity found on Earth. Developing respect means recognising and remembering that all living things have a right to live on this planet and a purpose in life. We should treat all living things as part of us and do no harm to them.

This is described aptly in *The Earth Charter*, “Recognize that all beings are interdependent and every form of life has value regardless of its worth to human beings.”<sup>10</sup> Without this respect and love for the environment, there will be no desire or wish to improve and protect it. Therefore, it is important that you first develop a respect for life on this Earth.

Humans have a bond with nature as described by the renowned biologist, Edward O. Wilson’s concept of biophilia. This phenomenon of biophilia is “defined as the innate tendency to focus upon life and lifelike forms, and in some instances to affiliate with them emotionally.”<sup>11</sup> Humans seem to enjoy natural landscapes, animals and

other living beings around us. We feel at ease with nature, and travel to explore the natural habitats and its occupants. One possible reason given to explain biophilia is that our ancestors came from the savannah and spent their lives with nature. So we seem to retain their instincts and prefer the natural world.

If biophilia is part of human nature, we should not lose that special bond. It is time for us to renew that bond with nature and its biodiversity. As Janine M. Benyus, author of *Biomimicry* reflects, “It is time for us as a culture to walk in the forest again. Once we see nature as a mentor, our relationship with the living world changes.”<sup>12</sup>

A good way to renew that bond is to start appreciating nature and the life around you. If you would like to explore the nature areas in Singapore, visit the [National Parks Board](#) and [Wildsingapore](#) websites for information on our nature areas, including: Sungei Buloh Wetland Reserve; Pulau Ubin and Chek Jawa; Labrador Nature Reserve and Bukit Timah Nature Reserve.

Guided walks are conducted for some nature areas and I would recommend you to go for such walks to gain more knowledge about the particular area. Some people are mistaken that Singapore is too small to have any nature areas worth visiting, but the biodiversity in these small areas are still an eye-opener if you are willing to spend some time there. Sign up today for a guided walk to a nature area and make a commitment to visit at least one nature area every month.

# Habit 2: Improve Your Environmental Awareness and Knowledge

“If we do not understand the problem, it is unlikely we will be able to fix it.”

- Carl Sagan<sup>13</sup>

“Man can hardly even recognise the devils of his own creation.”

- Albert Schweitzer<sup>14</sup>

If you wish to do something for the environment, it would be good to first improve your environmental awareness and knowledge. Habit 2 involves reading up on local and global environmental issues. What are the current environmental trends and problems? What needs to be done? What issues are you interested in and believe you can do something? Ideally, a holistic view on the environment should be adopted so that the connection and interdependence of various environmental issues and problems can be understood.

In the pursuit of environmental awareness and knowledge, we should not be misled or blinded by false environmental claims or “the sky is falling” scenarios. By learning about environmental issues from reliable sources that are supported with data or references, we can then judge for ourselves on the validity of the environmental problems and the possible solutions. It is too easy to exaggerate facts and mislead the public, especially when it involves technical or scientific issues. As Jack M. Hollander in *The Real Environmental Crisis* said, “performing the role of environmental watchdog does not confer license to

exaggerate, mislead, or strike fear in the hearts of a largely supportive public earnestly looking for information and guidance”<sup>15</sup>.

To increase your environmental knowledge, you could start by looking at the relationship between ecosystems and human systems through the discipline of environmental science. One recommended textbook on environmental science is [Living in the Environment](#) by G. Tyler Miller, Jr. In his book, there are also concept maps that give a good summary on the connections between ecosystems and humans.

The impact of humans on ecosystems can be summarised in three environmental themes: Resources (wastage and over-consumption of resources such as energy, water, food and other materials); Biodiversity (destruction of biodiversity and habitats, and over-exploitation of wildlife); and Quality (pollution of air, water and land; and global environmental problems such as ozone depletion and climate change).

Several channels are available where we can learn more about environmental issues: books; newspapers; magazines; reports; websites; seminars; schools; government sources; and non-governmental organisations. Make a commitment to read one recommended book, article or report every month. Also check out the recommended websites and subscribe to their email updates or RSS feeds for the latest news.

The following websites are recommended:

- [Asia is Green](#)  
Green resource guide for Singapore and Asia
- [Environmental News Network](#)  
Environmental news portal
- [GreenBiz](#)  
Green business news and resources
- [TreeHugger](#)  
All about sustainability
- [United Nations Environment Programme](#)  
Leading nations towards sustainability

- [World Business Council for Sustainable Development](#)  
Global association of companies exploring sustainable development
- [World Resources Institute](#)  
Environmental think tank
- [Worldwatch Institute](#)  
Research on a sustainable world
- [Worldchanging](#)  
Building a bright green future

The following books, articles and reports also serve as good resources on selected environmental topics. Some of them are classics and have inspired many people to do their part for the environment.

- [Silent Spring](#) by Rachel Carson (1962)  
This book explains the potential impact of excessive use of DDT and other pesticides on humans and the environment. It alerted the public on potential pollutants and is considered to have sparked the first environmental movement in the United States.

- [The Tragedy of the Commons](#) by Garrett Hardin (1968)  
This famous article by Garrett Hardin looks at the pressure on resources as populations increase, and the need to manage resources that belongs to everybody yet no one is protecting them.
- [Declaration of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment](#) (1972)  
This declaration was delivered at the 1972 Stockholm Conference, which was the first international conference that covered environmental issues.
- [Gaia: A New Look at Life on Earth](#) by James Lovelock (1979)  
This book introduces the Gaia hypothesis, which postulates that the Earth behaves like a living organism that is able to self-regulate.
- [Save the Earth](#) by Jonathon Porritt (1991)  
This book describes the environmental problems facing Earth and includes the comments and wisdom of many

important leaders and famous people. It inspired me to understand more about the environmental impacts of humans and to do something for the environment.

- [\*Earth in the Balance\*](#) by Al Gore (1992)

This book was written by the former United States Vice-President and he urges strongly about the need to take action to deal with environmental problems.

- [\*Agenda 21\*](#) (1992)

This blueprint for sustainable development was delivered in 1992 at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, also known as the Earth Summit.

- [\*The Ecology of Commerce: A Declaration of Sustainability\*](#) by Paul Hawken (1993)

This book explains how businesses impact the environment, and how they have the responsibility and potential to reconstruct and repair environmental and social problems.

- [\*Biomimicry: Innovation Inspired by Nature\*](#) by Janine M. Benyus (1997)

This book introduces biomimicry, a new science that encourages innovations by learning from nature. Nature has found solutions that humans could imitate and learn from.

- [\*The Earth Charter\*](#) (2000)

This charter is a declaration of the principles that should be followed to ensure a sustainable future.

- [\*Something New Under the Sun\*](#) by John McNeill (2001)

This book gives a concise history of how humans changed their environment throughout the twentieth century, which “qualifies as a peculiar century because of the screeching acceleration of so many processes that bring ecological change.”<sup>16</sup>

- [\*Cradle to Cradle: Remaking the Way We Make Things\*](#) by William McDonough and Michael Braungart (2002)  
This book describes the concept of waste equals food, and the design of products, which after their end-of-life becomes "biological nutrients" that safely re-enter the environment or as "technical nutrients" that circulate within closed-loop industrial cycles.
- [\*The Future of Life\*](#) by Edward O. Wilson (2002)  
This book describes the increasing loss of biodiversity and what we need to do to prevent further loss.
- [\*Red Sky at Morning\*](#) by James Gustave Speth (2004)  
This book gives an update on the state of the environment and suggests new strategies to deal with the problems.
- [\*The Weather Makers: How Man is Changing the Climate and What it Means for Life on Earth\*](#) by Tim Flannery (2006)  
This book gives a good summary of the history and

evidence for global warming and climate change. It helps to make sense of what is happening on the issue of climate change and provides solutions to tackle the problem.

- [\*Singapore Green Plan 2012 \(2006 Edition\)\*](#) by the Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources, Singapore (2006)  
This report describes Singapore's blueprint towards achieving environmental sustainability by 2012.
- [\*State of the Environment 2008 Report\*](#) by the Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources, Singapore (2008)  
This report describes the work and achievements by the Ministry and its statutory boards in protecting and improving the environment in Singapore.

- [\*Natural Capitalism: Creating the Next Industrial Revolution\*](#) by Paul Hawken, Amory Lovins, and L. Hunter Lovins (2008)

This book describes a future in which business can improve their bottom lines, help solve environmental problems and feel better about what they do all at the same time.

- [\*Worldchanging: A User's Guide for the 21st Century\*](#) by Alex Steffen (2008)

This book lists the ideas and examples of what a bright green future look like and how to get there.

- [\*Whole Earth Discipline: An Ecopragmatist Manifesto\*](#) by Steward Brand (2009)

This book describes the profound transformations of climate change, urbanization, and biotechnology, and suggests that environmentalists are going to have to reverse some longheld opinions and embrace tools that they have traditionally distrusted.

- [\*Sustainable Singapore Blueprint\*](#) by the Inter-Ministerial Committee on Sustainable Development, Singapore (2009)

This blueprint reports describes the recommendations, strategies and targets for making Singapore a lively and liveable global city in 2030.

- [\*Second National Communication on Climate Change\*](#) by the National Environment Agency, Singapore (2010)

This report was submitted to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), and details Singapore's strategies for managing sustainable growth and climate change, and presents an outline of the initiatives at present till 2030.

# Habit 3: Reduce Your Environmental Impact

“To live more simply, that others may simply live.”

- Jonathon Porritt<sup>17</sup>

“The multiple threats to the Earth are so complex that in most cases they seem beyond the reach of an average citizen’s influence. Yet we can all launch a personal campaign to reduce consumption ... It simply means stopping to think, before each purchase, ‘Do I really need this?’”

- Dervla Murphy<sup>18</sup>

In our modern society, overconsumption and wastage of resources seem to be a norm. We buy more than what is necessary, use and waste more water and electricity than needed, and throw away more waste. It takes individual responsibility to tackle the problem of overconsumption and wastage. Habit 3 is about reducing your environmental impact by taking personal actions to reduce energy, water and waste.

We can start by asking ourselves whether we should practise “sufficiency” in our consumption. As Paul Ekins explained, “In a society devoted to ever-greater consumption, it is hard not to identify sufficiency with notions of sacrifice, of ‘doing without’ or ‘giving things up’. Such identifications are, however, misplaced. Certainly, sufficiency implies relatively modest consumption and simplicity in personal lifestyle. But these are not motivated by abstract aestheticism or self-denial, but arise from a perception that sufficiency in consumption permits a greater emphasis to be placed on other aspects of human experience, which are actually more personally rewarding and fulfilling than consumption.”<sup>19</sup> We have to recognise

that there are other things to pursue in life besides buying, consuming and discarding; things that are more important like relationships, health and happiness.

Next, we can practise the 3Rs in our daily lives – Reduce, Reuse, and Recycle (in order of sequence). The sequence is important, as source reduction is usually the best way to minimise wastage while recycling still has some impact on the environment and should be done last. The 3Rs not only apply to waste management but can also be applied to energy and water management.

Reduce by not creating the wastage or minimising the waste in the beginning. Always remember the idea of sufficiency and ask yourself whether you need the item in the first place. Good practices include printing on paper only when necessary, using non-disposable or durable products, and switching to electronic bill statements instead of receiving printed copies.

We can reduce the wastage of water and energy through measures such as monitoring water and energy consumption; using water-efficient appliances and taps; ensuring that there are no leaking water pipes; using water-reducing nozzles; switching to energy-efficient light bulbs and appliances; and switching off lights when not in use. We can also reduce the consumption of fuel resources by driving less, switching to public transport or using more environmentally friendly cars.

Reuse by using the waste several times or for another purpose. When the waste is already generated, try to find some ways to use it instead of throwing it away. This could include buying reusable materials, using used plastic and glass bottles as containers for storage, donating unwanted items and clothing to charity, using both sides of the paper or converting used containers into art ornaments.

We can reuse the wastewater from the washing machine for cleaning the toilet. Rainwater can also be collected and used for washing the toilet or car, and for watering plants.

Recycle by sending the waste to be processed as a resource. This could include depositing waste such as used paper, cans and bottles into recycling bins or selling them to used item traders so that the waste can be sent for recycling.

The National Environment Agency (NEA) has implemented the National Recycling Programme for several years, where recycling bags or bins are given to residents living in HDB housing estates and private landed properties. These recycling bags or containers are given by appointed recycling contractors and are collected fortnightly. There are also recycling bins located at one in every five blocks of HDB flats.

Some HDB estates have the new programme where there is one recycling bin for every block with daily collection, and the recycling bags are no longer given. Some landed estates have the new programme where there is weekly collection from the recycling bins and separate collection of garden waste.

For condominiums and private apartments, it is mandatory for the management council to set up a structured recycling programme for residents and provide recycling bins or bags.

Residents should make use of the recycling programme in their area to recycle waste items instead of throwing them away. In addition, there are public recycling bins near train stations and high traffic locations, where the public can deposit their items. Given these recycling facilities in place, there is no excuse for people not to recycle.

More tips on the 3Rs can be found in the following websites and books:

- [Zero Waste Singapore](#)  
Useful information, news, tips, and resources on Zero Waste and the 3 Rs (Reduce, Reuse and Recycle)
- [Low Carbon Singapore](#)  
Useful information, news, tips, and resources on climate change, energy efficiency, and clean energy

- [Energy Efficient Singapore](#)  
Energy saving tips
- [National Environment Agency](#)  
Tips on Reduce, Reuse, and Recycle
- [Public Utilities Board](#)  
Water saving tips
- [Hong Kong Environmental Protection Department](#)  
Green tips to save the Earth
- [Friends of the Earth](#)  
How to reduce your environmental impact at home
- [Global Stewards](#)  
Environmental tips for individuals
- [The Green Book: The Everyday Guide to Saving the Planet One Simple Step at a Time](#) by Elizabeth Rogers and Thomas M. Kostigen
- [Go Make a Difference: Over 500 Daily Ways to Save the Planet](#) by Emma Jones and Jo Bourne
- [The New Green Consumer Guide](#) by Julia Hailes
- [The Lazy Environmentalist: Your Guide to Easy, Stylish, Green Living](#) by Josh Dorfman
- [Ready, Set, Green: Eight Weeks to Modern Eco-Living](#) by Graham Hill

Every one of us can look at our daily life and find ways to reduce our environmental impacts in terms of energy and water usage, and waste disposal. Reducing energy and water is not only good for the environment, it would also help us to save on utility costs. For waste, always remember to reduce or eliminate wastage in the beginning, and then reuse whatever waste that has been generated, and lastly recycle the waste that cannot be reused anymore. It would be good to keep in mind what Randy Hayes said, “Remember, waste is a construct that humanity invented at a time when industry lacked a deep understanding of ecological processes. There is no waste in nature.”<sup>20</sup>

# Habit 4: Spread the Green

## Message and Influence

### Others

“After all is said and done, silence is betrayal.”

- Jane Goodall and Marc Bekoff<sup>21</sup>

“Indifference is the essence of inhumanity.”

- George Bernard Shaw<sup>22</sup>

Besides caring about the environment and taking personal actions, you can practise Habit 4 by spreading the environmental or green message and educating family members, friends, classmates or colleagues. Share your environmental knowledge with them and remind them to reduce wastage and overconsumption. You can also make use of social media such as Facebook and Twitter to post updates and links on environmental problems and solutions, and share with all your friends.

Furthermore, you can influence the organisation that you belong to, whether it is a school, a company, or a social group, to be more environmentally friendly. Humans are social animals and we tend to do things together. Companies and organisations are formed to allow a larger group of people to come together and achieve more than what individuals can do. However, this increase in size inevitably leads to greater environmental impacts.

For example, big companies have more employees, and a wider reach and influence on the world's resources and population. More resources like water, energy and

minerals are used to produce goods and services; more waste and by-products are generated; and more land are needed to set up production plants. Therefore, it is important that companies and organisations understand their environmental footprint and start to be more environmentally friendly.

If you are a student, start influencing your school to adopt more environmentally friendly practices. For example, you could suggest to your school administration on the setting up of environmental clubs or on the implementation of recycling programmes. For secondary schools and junior colleges, students can also suggest to the school to take part in the Schools' Green Audit Awards programme organised by the Singapore Environment Council (SEC). Schools would have to conduct environmental audits and SEC would award the schools according to the level of environmental consciousness in the schools.

In particular, tertiary schools like universities should aim to be more sustainable. Universities produce graduates and academics like architects, engineers, scientists, lawyers,

businessmen and teachers. They hold key positions in society and their actions or behaviour could influence more than others. The university itself is a large institution with a big environmental footprint. Imagine its water and energy usage, the waste it generates, and the number of vehicles travelling through the campus. The influence and impact of a university, its occupants and graduates on the environment are tremendous and far-reaching.

My idea of a green university is one with a strong green culture where management, staff, undergraduates, postgraduates and alumni are environmentally aware and do their best to reduce their impact on the environment, whether it is on campus or in their daily lives. After graduating, the alumni would still keep the environment in mind when making decisions at work and ensure that their businesses would have minimal impacts on the environment. University students should aim to influence their university to be green, through initiating projects and activities.

It is often difficult to change the mindsets and habits of people, and get them to embrace the green message. In the book, *The Tipping Point*, by Malcolm Gladwell, he explores how a message can be spread and then tipped so that everyone is aware of it. There are some lessons that could be learned from his book – The Law of the Few, The Stickiness Factor, and The Power of Context<sup>23</sup>. Let us use his ideas to see how we could spread the green message in a university.

The Law of the Few says that a selected group of people are essential to spread a message. Students could be recruited to spread the environmental message, but not just any student. We want students who know lots of people such as those involved in student groups or staying in hostels (Connectors); students who have good knowledge of environmental issues such as those in the environmental engineering, environmental management and geography courses (Mavens); and students who can promote and persuade others to adopt the message such as those in the marketing and law courses (Salesmen). These selected groups of students would be in-charge of

spreading the message to their fellow students. With the support of the university management and staff, the students would organise innovative activities to spread the message.

The Stickiness Factor says that the content of a message should be personal and practical so that it can be remembered. The environmental message should have clear, relevant and practical advices on what the students can do. For example, using both sides of the paper, recycling used paper and drink cans, switching off lights when leaving tutorial and lecture rooms, etc. State the benefits of a green university in terms of how the students can reduce impacts on the environment and cut costs, and the possible reduction in school fees, increased subsidies or more student welfare resulting from the cost reduction. It should be made clear to the students what they can do, how they can do it, and what benefits they can gain from their actions.

The Power of Context says that a message may be tipped by small changes in context. Awareness on environmental issues and efforts to spread the environmental message can be incorporated into the context of the university education, which helps student understand that the environment is not something abstract and may be relevant to their daily lives or what they do in their future work. To increase environmental awareness, there could be compulsory courses on environmental awareness for first-year students, increased talks and seminars on the environment, and competitions for students to give suggestions on reducing wastage.

Furthermore, students could be involved in spreading the green message through projects and case studies during their coursework. For example, Business Administration students could be involved in projects to market the green message. Engineering students could be involved in projects to explore new environmental technology or improve the efficiency of existing equipment on campus. Science students could be involved in monitoring the ecology on campus and conducting surveys on

environmental awareness. Arts and Social Sciences students could be involved in studies on the behaviour and psychology of green students, and how to increase participation.

If you are working in a company, you can similarly influence your company to adopt more environmentally friendly practices. A company can first conduct an environmental audit and find out which areas need to be improved. Sometimes, it is only a matter of changing habits or pointing out that certain practices are undesirable. In addition, companies could implement the ISO 14001 Environmental Management System or have a Corporate Social Responsibility policy. Nowadays, more companies are aware of their responsibility, and are producing social and environmental reports for their stakeholders or getting green certification.

Companies should explore ways to reduce their energy, water, fuel, and material consumption. More importantly, companies need to move upstream in their environmental efforts by adopting a cradle-to-cradle thinking for reducing

waste: “To eliminate the concept of waste means to design things – products, packaging and systems – from the very beginning in the understanding that waste does not exist.”<sup>24</sup> Companies should be reminded that designing with the environment in mind would be better than “end of pipe” solutions in reducing their environmental impacts.

For an introduction on environmental friendly practices, you can refer to the following websites:

- [Green Business Singapore](#)  
Singapore's leading online sustainability toolkit for businesses, with a green editorial focus on Strategy and Leaders, Operations and Culture, Design and Tech, and Marketing and CSR
- [Guidebook on Waste Minimisation for Industries](#) by the National Environment Agency
- [Water Efficiency Measures](#) by PUB
- [Carbon Trust](#)  
Tools, guides and reports for reducing energy usage and carbon emissions

- [Energy Star](#)  
Guidelines for energy management
- [Eco-Management and Audit Scheme \(EMAS\)](#)  
EMAS Toolkit for small organisations
- [Envirowise](#)  
Resources on practical ways to minimise waste and reduce environmental impacts
- [GreenBiz](#)  
Reports and tools on business sustainability
- [WasteWise](#)  
Resources to develop a waste reduction programme

Check out the tips, tools and reports in the websites, and select a few practices that might work in your company. Share those practices with your colleagues and suggest to the management on adopting those green practices.

# Habit 5: Support Green Initiatives and Groups

“In the end, our society will be defined not only by what we create, but by what we refuse to destroy.”

- John C. Sawhill<sup>25</sup>

“I can hardly imagine living without hope. As for the future of the world, there is a colorful spectrum of possibilities, from the worst to the best. What will happen, I do not know. Hope forces me to believe that those better alternatives will prevail, and above all it forces me to do something to make them happen.”

- Václav Havel<sup>26</sup>

In *Sustainability and Cities*, Ooi Giok Ling noted that, “In the area of environmental policy decision-making, the role of the state has been dominant. The policy decision-making process has been highly centralised, with practically little contribution from civil society”<sup>27</sup>. The Singapore government has always ensured that we are protected and potential problems are quickly solved. The local environment has been taken good care of, so good that we do not see the need to care or be responsible for our environment.

Most Singaporeans have developed a tendency to depend on the government and not take responsibility. Their view is that if there are any problems, the government would take care of them. For example, some people feel that they do not have to save water as the government has developed alternative sources of water from Newater and desalination plants. Even if they waste water, the water would be recycled into Newater. This indifferent and complacent attitude needs to be changed if we are to ensure a sustainable environment, which requires the efforts of both the government and the people.

John F. Kennedy once said, “ask not what your country can do for you – ask what you can do for your country”<sup>28</sup>. Instead of relying or expecting the government to take care of our environment, it is time for Singaporeans to do their part and take responsibility. Habit 5 involves participating in government and civil society initiatives and programmes for the environment.

Support green campaigns and programmes by the government such as the [National Recycling Programme](#) by NEA, the [Water Efficient Homes](#) by PUB, and the [Community In Bloom](#) programme by NParks. You could also initiate projects to improve the environment and get funding from the government agencies.

For example, funding is available from the National Environment Agency’s [3P Partnership Fund](#), and the National Youth Council’s [Young ChangeMakers and Youth Development Grant](#). Furthermore, there are competitions that encourage young people to initiate environmental projects and research. For example, Sembawang Shipyard

organises an annual [Green Wave](#) competition for students to develop environmental projects.

Support the local environmental causes, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and environmental groups. Join the various activities organised by the NGOs and groups or volunteer your time with them. Several NGOs and groups are contributing to the environmental causes in Singapore and some of them include:

- [Animal Concerns Research and Education Society](#)
- [Avelife Foundation](#)
- [Blue Water Volunteers](#)
- [Cat Welfare Society](#)
- [Environmental Challenge Organisation \(Singapore\)](#)
- [Ground-Up Initiative](#)
- [International Coastal Cleanup Singapore](#)
- [Jane Goodall Institute \(Singapore\)](#)
- [Kampung Temasek](#)
- [Nature Society \(Singapore\)](#)
- [Raffles Museum Toddycats](#)

- [Singapore Environment Council](#)
- [Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals](#)
- [TeamSeagrass](#)
- [Vegetarian Society \(Singapore\)](#)
- [Waterways Watch Society](#)
- [WWF Singapore](#)

Besides relying on the government to protect the environment, NGOs and environmental groups also play a major role. They can also make good decisions and solve problems; sometimes a bottom-up approach is better than one that is top-down. James Surowiecki in *The Wisdom of Crowds* wrote, “under the right circumstances, groups are remarkably intelligent...”<sup>29</sup> and “if you set a crowd of self-interested, independent people to work in a decentralised way on the same problem, instead of trying to direct their efforts from the top down, their collective solution is likely to be better than any other solution you could come up with”<sup>30</sup>.

# Habit 6: Participate as an Active Citizen

“Our future is not merely something that happens to us but something that we participate in creating. If we do this consciously, we can create a world that works.”

- Paul H. Ray and Sherry Ruth Anderson<sup>31</sup>

“We must become participants, not mere observers, in building the Singapore we want for the future. We must be aware of what is happening around us. We should learn not only to express our views or suggest alternative solutions, but also to put our suggestions into action. By doing so, we share the burden of the problem and take responsibility for the outcome.”

- Singapore 21 Committee<sup>32</sup>

Habit 6 involves using our rights as citizens and participating actively and positively. As citizens, we should participate in the formulation of government policies regarding the environment. This could be through government dialogues or feedback channels, and also through the media. For example, the REACH platform by the government allows feedback and discussion on various green issues and policies.

The government agencies are also having more public consultations on environmental policies and strategies. For example, the [National Climate Change Secretariat](#) (NCCS) conducted public consultations on climate change from September 2011 to January 2012, as part of the development of the National Climate Change Strategy 2012, and received over 1,000 comments from stakeholders and members of the public.

Another example is the National Parks Board (NParks), which is seeking public feedback and ideas for the [City in a Garden](#) vision, from August 2011 to June 2012. You can play a part in shaping what our living environment could

look like by providing your ideas and suggestions through the NParks website.

In some cases, we can also play a part in advocating green causes that we feel strongly about, and try to persuade the government in rethinking their policies and decisions.

For example, the episode on Chek Jawa is a classic example of how public opinion and feedback reversed the government's stand, and deferred reclamation works at Chek Jawa (the actual process took more hard work). As Chua Ee Kiam explained in *Chek Jawa*, "The groundswell of public support and spirited attitude of individuals determined to pursue a cause made the difference"<sup>33</sup>.

Another example is the process of public consultation and engagement for [The Green Corridor](#), which the Nature Society proposed to conserve the former KTM railway lands as a continuous green corridor. The government considered Nature Society's suggestions and the public support for the idea, and is working actively with the

interest groups and allowing the public to suggest ideas for the rail corridor.

There are opportunities for people to voice out their concerns about the environment through several channels and we should make use of them constructively. In this digital age, feedback and comments can be directed to the relevant parties easily through email. The email addresses of government agencies and relevant officials can be easily obtained online. The websites of government agencies also provide sufficient information for the public to go through and have channels for them to give their views. Online social media, discussion forums and blogs also provide alternative channels for voicing opinions.

As we state our stand on environmental issues, it is important to base it not only on our convictions but also based on facts and adopting a positive win-win mentality. It is not about us against the government or the government against the environment.

As Chua Lee Hoong reported on the Chek Jawa issue, “It was a day the Government proved itself responsive to public feedback, a day it showed itself open to the merits of persuasive argument from citizens ... On the part of the Chek Jawa activists, they showed how to make their cause and win it. On the internet, in the newspapers and in public forums, these concerned Singaporeans pleaded their cause, passionately but rationally and with civility at all times”<sup>34</sup>.

# Habit 7: Choose to be a Responsible Consumer

“Vote. And I don’t mean voting at a voting booth. Anybody of any age can vote because you vote every day that you pay for something. Every time you lay money down on the counter to buy something, you are saying that I approve of this object. I approve of how it was made, the materials that are in it, and what’s going to happen to it when I no longer need it and throw away.”

- Gloria Flora

“There is no business to be done on a dead planet”

- David Brower

As consumers, we have the power to choose and buy what we need and want. However, with increasing choices available in the market, we developed bigger appetites as consumers, consuming more than what is needed and generating more waste than necessary. This is made worse by the endless bombardment of advertising all around us. More often than not, we end up buying things we do not really need. With the amount of advertising around us, it becomes harder to keep our consumption within limits.

Habit 7 is about making a conscious choice to be a responsible consumer. Instead of asking you to buy and consume nothing, we advocate a shift towards these three sustainable consumption behaviour:

Buy only what you need and always think twice before buying. It is not about sacrifice but about focusing more on the meaning (relationship, health and happiness) and less on the means (money and stuff).

Buy green products that benefit you, your family, people and the environment. Choose more eco-friendly, sustainable and organic products with less impact and made by sustainable businesses.

Buy ethical products and support social enterprises that help disadvantaged people live better lives. Support businesses that take care of their employees' economical, social, health and environmental conditions.

You can find out more about green, eco, sustainable, organic, and ethical products and services from [Greenstore](#) - Singapore's first review and rating guide for green consumers.

Do we have the power to choose what we want? Can we influence companies to reduce the environmental impacts of their operations and products, avoid excessive packaging, reduce toxic chemicals in their products, treat their employees fairly, and benefit the community? Nowadays, companies have become increasingly aware of their corporate responsibility to the community and the

environment. Consumers can ride on this increasing awareness, and use traditional and social media to feedback or remind companies to be more responsible.

Thomas Friedman commented in *The Lexus and the Olive Tree* that: "Thanks to the Internet, environmentalists in one country are quickly relaying how a multinational behaves in their country to environmentalists in other countries. Therefore, more and more multinationals are realizing that to preserve their global reputation and global brands in the face of Internet activism, they need to be more environmentally responsible"<sup>35</sup>.

However, some sceptics might be doubtful of a company's self-proclaim corporate responsibility because a company's responsibility is to seek maximum profits for its shareholders. In his book, *The Corporation*, Joel Bakan described a company or corporation: "As a psychopathic creature, the corporation can neither recognise nor act upon moral reasons to refrain from harming others. Nothing in its legal makeup limits what it can do to others in pursuit of its selfish ends, and it is compelled to cause

harm when the benefits of doing so outweigh the costs. Only pragmatic concern for its own interests and the laws of the land constrain the corporation's predatory instincts, and often that is not enough to stop it from destroying lives, damaging communities, and endangering the planet as a whole."<sup>36</sup>

Therefore as consumers, we have to keep the "creature" in check and constantly ensure that the company recognises its responsibility to the environment. If the company continues to neglect the environment, we can always boycott the company and its products. After all, the customer is king.

# Conclusion

“Which road we take depends on which moral choices we make. Since we have the capacity for both moral and immoral actions, and the freedom to choose, our destiny lies within.”

- Michael Shermer<sup>37</sup>

“Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space lies our freedom and power to choose our response.”

- Stephen R. Covey<sup>38</sup>

In this technological age, some experts believe that technology is able to solve all human problems. However, I believe that most environmental problems ultimately do not have a “technical solution”. As Garrett Hardin defined in *The Tragedy of the Commons*, a technical solution is “one that requires a change only in the techniques of the natural sciences, demanding little or nothing in the way of change in human values or ideas of morality”<sup>39</sup>. Technology can be used as a tool or means to solve environmental problems but ultimately the decision to want to do something for the environment is based on our own inner morals; how we view our relationship with nature and its biodiversity.

Our commitment to solve environment problems can only come from our inner reflection of what is right and wrong, and our desire to do good for nature and its living beings. Even if we put aside the morality issue, it boils down to how we want to live. As The Dalai Lama reflects, “The natural world is our home. It is not necessarily sacred or holy, it is simply where we live. It is therefore in our interest to look after it. This is common sense.”<sup>40</sup>

# About the Author

Eugene Tay is the Director of Green Future Solutions. He is a sustainability and green media consultant who believes in sharing the environmental message and inspiring and empowering others to take action.

Eugene previously worked for the National Environment Agency on waste minimisation and recycling, and taught Ecotourism at the Ngee Ann Polytechnic.

Eugene has a Master's degree in Civil and Environmental Engineering from the Nanyang Technological University and a Bachelor's degree in Environmental Engineering with a Minor in Technopreneurship from the National University of Singapore.

[Green Future Solutions](#) is a Singapore-based sustainability consulting company that helps businesses and organisations address environmental challenges and identify green opportunities.

Green Future Solutions is the publisher of Singapore's leading websites on the environment, including:

- [Asia is Green](#)
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