

# HOW TO BECOME A LEADER IN SUSTAINABILITY





## WHAT IS LEADERSHIP?

Traditional definitions of leadership emphasize the activity, attitudes, and characteristics of a single individual and the impact they can have on those around them. Charismatic. Motivational. Inspiring. Committed. Skilled Communicator. All of these are words associated with traditional definitions of leaders and leadership.

Here are some classic examples:

1. “Leadership is the capacity to translate vision into reality.” - Warren Bennis
2. “Leadership is a process of social influence, which maximizes the efforts of others, towards the achievement of a goal.” - Kevin Kruse

Facebook COO Sheryl Sandburg argues that we need to move beyond traditional definitions:

**“Presenting leadership as a list of carefully defined qualities (like strategic, analytical, and performance-oriented) no longer holds. Instead, true leadership stems from individuality that is honestly and sometimes imperfectly expressed.... Leaders should strive authenticity over perfection.”**

Sandburg is on to something, but she does not go far enough. As we face global sustainability challenges, we need a new kind of “leadership from the middle” - leadership that moves beyond the personal traits of individuals to distribute leadership opportunities broadly with organizations.



## WHAT IS SUSTAINABILITY?

Our definition for sustainability is a simple one: “Shared Well-Being on a Healthy Planet.”

We know that sustainable actions improve people’s quality of life while protecting and restoring the natural ecosystems and resources on which human well-being depends.



## LEADERSHIP AND SUSTAINABILITY

The next four decades will be the most important in human history because we are facing a global, environmental crisis. In the face of this enormous challenge, we need decisive, thoughtful action and we need individuals who understand what leadership ought to look like in the face of multifaceted challenges.

In this resource, we will explore definitions of leadership, explain why leadership is necessary for sustainable efforts to succeed, and share how Bard is teaching leadership from the middle to the next generation of sustainability professionals.



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# WHY SUSTAINABILITY EFFORTS NEED STRONG COLLECTIVE LEADERSHIP

It's no secret that we're facing a complex, global environmental crisis. The 2015 Paris Agreement [marked the beginning of a new phase in global awareness and cooperation](#) to fighting the threat of climate change. Most countries and most major corporations are seeking ways to curtail environmental threats and support sustainability.

But what kind of leadership is needed in order to make genuine, persistent progress on environmental goals and projects? Traditional leadership models emphasize a cult of personality around a specific leader or personality. Think of people like Mahatma Gandhi, or CEOs like Jeff Bezos, Indra Nooyi, and Steve Jobs. Typically this kind of leadership is associated with individual personality traits or some mysterious inborn quality.

Do we need a sustainability savior?

## NO, WE NEED SHARED LEADERSHIP

Scholarship and experience in the field of sustainability suggests that [a different vision of leadership is needed to tackle 21st century challenges](#).

A [recent paper published in Sustainability: The Journal of Record](#) provides an overview of the type of leadership competencies sustainability professionals can and should cultivate: shared leadership.

The confluence of three elements creates occasions where shared leadership has taken place:

1. **Direction.** Direction results when stakeholders agree on goals and strategies to achieve these goals.
2. **Alignment.** Alignment results when stakeholders coordinate resources to implement the strategies to achieve those goals.
3. **Commitment.** Commitment results when stakeholders willingly work toward those goals, even at some sacrifice to self-interest.

Radical change toward sustainability takes vision, commitment, and persistence at the community, organization, and personal levels. Your career success in the world of sustainability—in other words, your ability to actually change the world for the better—relies on your capacity for learning how to engage in shared leadership.

# LEADERSHIP IS IN HIGH DEMAND: THE CORPORATE DESIRE FOR SUSTAINABLE LEADERS

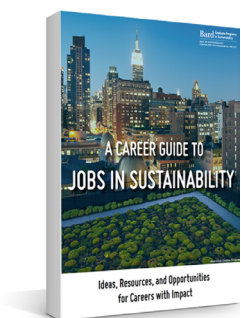
One of the biggest reasons we need a new kind of leadership model in order to tackle sustainability challenges is [because they are “wicked” problems](#), problems with a high degree of complexity, an abundance of conflicting information or opinion, many interrelated factors, among other characteristics.

Corporations are increasingly focused both on hiring for specialized sustainability teams and departments and on improving sustainable awareness across the board within all teams.

**[The movement toward sustainability is growing](#): according to a recent study produced by the Environmental Defense Fund Climate Corps program, the sustainability sector alone is now employing around 4.5 million people across the country.**

[Companies are aware that their long-term growth, popularity, and profitability](#) depend on their ability to transition to a sustainable way of thinking about business. In order to make this transition successfully, they need people who have been trained to think and act in terms of a shared leadership model and [who can confront multifaceted or “wicked” challenges](#) with comfort and flexibility.

**Saving the planet is a growth field. Check out our comprehensive resource on careers in sustainability:**



**DOWNLOAD CAREER GUIDE TO  
JOBS IN SUSTAINABILITY**



# BUILDING YOUR NETWORK: THE KEY TO SUCCESS IN A SUSTAINABILITY CAREER

“The sustainability community is relatively small, but growing and tends to be very supportive. I think the community in the Bard MBA program is incredibly unique and one of the best parts of the program. The residency format is intense, but that intensity leads to deep relationships...Further, the program itself is really community led, which has a really nice parallel to how the sustainability community more broadly has been shaping the field.” – Laura Gitman

The sustainability community as a whole is tight-knit, inclusive, and encouraging. The challenges we face globally give us a common project to devote our talents, time, and attention to, and part of this includes helping and supporting each other.

True leaders understand the importance of relying on a network of people for help, support, and resources. Networking means collecting a group of supporters who are genuinely interested in you and the contributions that you can make to local and global sustainability challenges. [A power network is one in which your network members are powerful people](#); power is simply the ability to make change.

If you're interested in making a career in a sustainability related field or role, start consciously developing your network now.

## PRACTICAL TIPS FOR GROWING YOUR SUSTAINABILITY NETWORK

1. Find the powerful people who are working in their field and [offer to help them](#).
2. Surround yourself with a diverse community that draws strength from all sources: art, story, intellect, resources, hierarchy, etc.
3. Find [a graduate program](#) that emphasizes professional development and growth in leadership.



## TRY OUT THIS CONCRETE NETWORKING EXERCISE

- Step One:** In your chosen location, find the three organizations doing the most interesting work.
- Step Two:** In each of those organizations, find one person doing the most interesting project—perhaps they have written an article or blog post about it.
- Step Three:** Write or call the person and ask to interview him or her for an article you are writing about leadership in the X industry in Y city. Interview the contact, and write the article. Show what a good analyst and writer you are. Demonstrate thought leadership in the field.
- Step Four:** Publish the article in your student newspaper, local newspaper or on a blog. If you reach out to us with a strong piece, we may even publish you on the [Bard Center for Environmental Policy \(CEP\) EcoReader Blog](#).
- Step Five:** Send the link to the article to each of the interviewers.



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# HOW TO BECOME A SUSTAINABLE LEADER? TIPS FOR SUCCESS FROM DR. EBAN GOODSTEIN



Whether you're interested in launching a successful political campaign, starting a new business, or landing an important role at your dream company, there are five basic things that all aspiring leaders need to consider as they embark on a new venture. These five things are needed in order to get something done in the world.

These principles are woven throughout the curriculum of our Bard programs and are condensed for aspiring leaders in sustainability in [our C2C weekend retreats](#).

- 1. Start with a vision.** Aspiring leaders need to have a dream or vision that drives them. Start by clarifying to yourself your goals, aspirations, and the path you think you need to take to get where you want to be.
- 2. Have courage and conviction.** Once you have your vision, it's time to work on your courage and conviction in order to see that vision through. Do you have the guts to stand up for the vision you've developed and boldly proclaim your reasons why to others?
- 3. Develop your network.** Armed with courage and inspired by your vision, you're ready to start sharing your vision with other people. Take the time to seek out like-minded people and to develop your network in your area of interest. In order to do this well, it is crucial to be good at [storytelling](#). The secret to powerful storytelling is practice. Consider developing your story and then practicing it at least six times until it feels natural and powerful in the way you intend.
- 4. Ask for what you need.** At some point, you just need to ask for what you need, whether it is for an introduction, resources, or a job. Once you've cultivated your vision, grown in courage, and honed your storytelling capacity, you should be able to convince others that your vision is important for them to invest in as well.

# CHECK OUT THESE ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



## THE MBA OF THE FUTURE: WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN A CUTTING-EDGE BUSINESS SCHOOL

This page will help you think about what to look for in an MBA program, how to think about the relationships between people, planet, and profit, and how an MBA in Sustainability could translate to a successful career in business, non-profit leadership, and much more.

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## A CRASH COURSE IN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

We invite you to a crash course in sustainability principles. Get a glimpse of what you could learn in two weeks with Bard's Center for Environmental Policy.

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# PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR SUSTAINABLE LEADERS: HERE'S THE BARD DIFFERENCE

“Leading the sustainability transformation towards a flourishing world requires all of us to recognize our own potential for leadership. We need to see it as a resource in need of development, management, and to gain a picture of our drivers and motivators.” –Gilles Mesrobian

Here at Bard, we have spent a lot of time thinking about leadership, about sustainability, and about how to offer a graduate education that combines the practical and theoretical tools that students need to be successful.

Here's a sampling of what we offer to graduate students in order to prepare them for career success and leadership in sustainability:

- 1. C2C Weekends.** These [communication intensive weekend retreats](#) are designed to support aspiring sustainability leaders in policy, politics, and business. Graduates of these workshops join a national network with access to continuing educational and professional opportunities. C2C Fellows are leaders whose vision is to change the world. Our mission is to accelerate their life's work.
- 2. Extended professional internships baked into the program.** In the second year of study, all students complete a four-to-six month, high-level internship in locations ranging from Washington DC, to New York City, Texas, Oregon, and Alaska; across the world in Thailand, South Africa, Geneva; and close to home, in the Hudson Valley. Between 30% and 50% of internships turn directly into jobs. The internship is a major item on our graduates' resumes, and supports development of their career networks.
- 3. Network of speakers and mentors.** The Bard community is fully engaged with an entire network of speakers and mentors that increases students' access to talented, connected people in the world of sustainability. [Our weekly podcast, "The Impact Report,"](#) puts our students, alumni, and faculty into weekly conversation with sustainability leaders from around the world, from the C-suite in New York City to social enterprises in rural Africa.
- 4. Faculty who are experienced, practical leaders in the field.** Bard has assembled an amazing faculty of engaged practitioners who are also excellent teachers. Bard hires practitioners to teach strategy, marketing, finance, operations, and in fact, all of our classes—people who are actually inventing sustainable business in their day-jobs. Our New York City location provides an incredibly rich applicant pool from which to draw, ensuring a faculty committed to excellence in the classroom, and to personal engagement with students in their learning and career development.

## WHERE BARD CEP AND MBA ALUMNI/AE ARE WORKING:

This page will help you think about what to look for in an MBA program, how to think about the relationships between people, planet, and profit, and how an MBA in Sustainability could translate to a successful career in business, non-profit leadership, and much more.

**Bard MBA**  
IN SUSTAINABILITY  
IN THE HEART OF NEW YORK CITY

US EPA  
United Nations  
NYS Dept. of Environmental Conservation  
Wildlife Habitat Council  
NY Academy of Sciences  
Riverkeeper  
Sierra Club  
Peace Corps  
Clean Energy States Alliance  
Pace Energy and Climate Center  
NRDC  
NY Dept. of Public Health  
Congressional Sportsman Foundation  
Clean Water Network  
Williams-Sonoma  
World Resources Institute  
Nature Conservancy  
IBM  
Center for Sustainable Energy  
US Army Corps of Engineers  
City of Austin  
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention  
American Farmland Trust  
WaterFurnace International

**Bard CEP**  
CENTER FOR ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY

Etsy  
CBRE  
Amazon  
Kaiser Permanente  
US EPA  
Morgan Stanley  
UNDP  
US Nuclear Regulatory Commission  
Thielsch Engineering  
Peace Corps  
Williams-Sonoma, Inc.  
PANTHERA  
Global Gender Office  
National Young Farmers Coalition  
WaterFurnace International  
Target  
UNDP  
Luminary Media  
Natural Resources Defense Council  
NY Dept. of Environmental Conservation  
NYC Dept. of Parks and Recreation  
Center for Sustainable Energy  
FEMA  
The World Bank  
Biotechnology Innovation Organization  
Sierra Club  
GI Energy  
International Food Policy Research Institute

**EXPLORE BARD'S MBA**

**EXPLORE BARD'S CEP PROGRAMS**

# HEAR FROM BARD'S SUSTAINABILITY THOUGHT LEADERS ABOUT PATHS TO SUCCESS IN SUSTAINABILITY

## KRISTINA KOHL

“As a sustainability leader, I think of the long-term impact of my decisions and encourage those that I mentor and coach view their role through a similar lens. From a human capital perspective, I believe that leaders need to consider talent development and management alongside strategy and operations in order to engage employees. In evaluating an organization’s market capitalization, intangibles such as culture and people have increasingly been contributing more to valuation than tangible assets. Leaders in sustainability embrace engagement and seek to create a culture of inclusion that welcomes all parties to bring their true selves to the organizations and to fully participate in its success.



In order to move toward becoming a sustainable leader, you must understand where your organization is in its sustainability journey as well as the organization’s performance and change model. Leaders ensure that sustainability is a foundational pillar of the organization as part of building organizational agility and resilience. Through engagement with internal and external stakeholders, they align business and sustainable strategy into a unified strategy. Communication is key to the change management process both internally and externally. Becoming a leader in sustainability means “walking the talk” and leading by action and example.”

## GILLES MESROBIAN



“The most important quality of leadership is self awareness. If I can impart that lesson upon [my students] I have made a profound difference in their ability to lead and to be successful as leaders.

One of the greatest strengths of the Bard program is the community that we are building. Communities have the inherent ability to solve problems. There are multiple opportunities for networking and community engagement at Bard but the opportunities are dependent upon the engagement and passion of the students themselves. Anyone with a passion for sustainability will quickly find the channels to express and develop their passion and skill in this field.

Identify your vision and let it lead you. You’ll find others who share your passion and want to help you realize your vision.”

## LAURA GITMAN



“The advice I often give is to think about sustainability broadly, and go beyond opportunities that formally have sustainability in the title. We need people who are passionate about sustainability to go into all functions, if we are going to truly integrate sustainability into core business. I encourage students to go into marketing, finance, or whatever they desire, and to embed sustainability principles into their every day work.

I love seeing the incredible growth [Bard] students have in just one year. They improve in terms of confidence, public speaking, teamwork, and real-world experience. For my classes, the biggest change is often that they recognize a value in the concept of process itself. When they begin my courses, they are often impatient with the amount of time we spend on process and strategic frameworks- they want to jump into the content and go straight to an answer. I spend a lot of time emphasizing that even if they can get to the “right answer”, they may not be able to convince a client, a partner, an investor or their boss if they cannot back up that answer with strong analysis. A clear, planned approach and strategic analysis will enable them to be more efficient, effective, persuasive and impactful in their work. It’s such a joy to watch my students realize that value themselves.”

## CAROLINE RAMALEY

“All of our graduate programs are very conscious of modelling for our students the kind of supportive, collaborative community that we want to create in the sustainability space. We build in a host of opportunities for our students to network, from hosting guest speakers to subsidizing student attendance at conferences, because we know that building community is key to our students’ success, and because growing the sustainability network is crucial to our ability to shape the future.

Our students gain so much from the hands-on learning that’s central to our philosophy. In the M.S. and M.Ed. programs, our high level professional internship provides students with significant on-the-ground experience. They return from their internships with a real professional focus and equipped with the skills to take on significant sustainability challenges.



[The Bard approach to leadership is valuable] because it’s inclusive. We know that leaders of diverse backgrounds and perspectives are necessary to ignite and sustain real change.”

## CHRIS LAVALLEE



“Bard emphasizes leadership training, encouraging students to develop the tools necessary to become a successful leader. The first year emphasizes presentation skills including public speaking and fully engaging an audience through a variety of exercises that are applied across the curriculum. The second year goes a step further and includes lessons in negotiation and networking with powerful people. These exercises often took us out of our comfort zone but proved to be valuable learning experiences that helped us to develop the tools to become strong leaders.

The Bard C2C workshop has a fast-paced series of exercises that teach public speaking and quick thinking related to solving environmental problems. The emphasis is on developing strong communications skills in order to discuss the importance of environmental issues and the possible solutions. During the weekend, fellows learn how to go beyond small-talk to create meaningful connections with people, which is perhaps the most important lesson from the experience. Breaking down these social barriers to connect with people is a vital step in developing strong interpersonal leadership skills.

My strongest skill set I learned in my time at Bard is how to communicate complicated information to a “non-expert” audience in a way that helps them to not only understand the issue, but to also care about it. That is the most important skill I have brought into the workforce.

My top piece of advice [for someone who wants to work in sustainability] would be to do an extended internship or entry-level job with an organization that is well-known within your chosen industry. I went to an undergraduate school that few people have heard of, which I’ve realized has hurt me when networking or applying to jobs. Professional conversations flow much more smoothly when I talk about my experiences at the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority and at ICF International than when I bring up the small non-profit I worked at in Vermont or my experience at my undergraduate school. When I was applying for jobs two years ago, I got a lot of calls back from organizations who worked with NYSERDA in some capacity. Simply having that organization on my resume prompted recruiters to reach out to me and continues to be a strong talking point as I network three years later.”

# CONNECT WITH BARD

We hope this resource has been helpful as you consider the sustainability challenges we face, the types of leadership needed to tackle them, and ways you could grow and develop as a sustainability leader in a graduate program.

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