

Voices of Sustainability: Season 1, Episode #3

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TRT: 21:41

Intro

Hello and welcome, I'm Phillip Schlies and you are listening to the Voices of Sustainability Podcast. Join us as we delve into the various strategies and challenges faced by the government, businesses, and non-profits, all striving to balance economic growth with environmental and social responsibility.

This season from the University of South Carolina, our reporters are all business majors at the Darla Moore School of Business with a concentration in sustainability. They'll be talking with various organizations to highlight how they're working to improve the world we live in and conserve our natural resources.

To explore the topic of sustainability, the episodes will explore how each person being interviewed defines sustainability, how the success of sustainability initiatives are measured in their organization, the motivations to be sustainable, and how to have a positive impact in your career. The conversations also provide insights into topics such as, circular economy and recycling, innovation and technology in sustainability, as well as regulation and policy that are influencing this space.

On today's episode, our reporter Lucie Perrin will be speaking with Mumford Industries' Vice President of Business Development and Marketing, Tina Green. Mumford Industries is a full-service recycling company that has over 25 years in the plastics recycling industry. Tina's been with the company for 18 years now and we'll dive into her insights on recycling, the hurdles of promoting sustainability in business, and Mumford Industries' ongoing strides in environmental stewardship. Let's get into it.

Script

Lucie Perrin

Hello, everyone! I'm Lucie. Today, we're excited to host Tina Green from Mumford Industries and without further delay, I'll let Tina introduce herself to you all.

Tina Green

Sure. I'm Tina Green. I'm with Mumford Industries and we are an industrial postindustrial plastics recycler located in South Carolina. And we've been in business for over 28 years.

Lucie Perrin

OK. Can you talk about your journey and also your responsibility at Mumford Industries? Like your previous experiences and what you do now at Mumford.

Tina Green

Right I began my journey as a Rep for vice management was not where I thought I was going to work, but it's where I ended up working and I was with waste management for about 7 years. I was an account Rep for them. I left there and was a general manager for a paper recycling facility. So, I did that for about a year. And during that year and the following year, I was a consultant for large industrial customers on how to save on their waste and options for recycling. So I would go in and read people, customers' bills and say you should do this. You shouldn't do this. This is saving you money. And during the year that I was a general manager for the paper company and doing consulting, I met Mumford Industries. They were already in business, and I use them as an outlet or as an option for some of the things that I was trying to recycle. When I was with the paper company, I actually took some of the things that Mumford had and recycled for them, so we already had kind of a business partnership at that point. So after consulting for about a year, Mumford came to me and asked me if I would be interested in working exclusively for them, which just made my job easier because when I was consulting I was responsible for setting up trucks and finding ways to get things moved. And Mumford already had some of that structure, so I could do what kind of what I was doing anyway but do it within the Mumford Industries Group. So I went in there as a partner and I've been there now for 18 years, I think, and I am a Business development person, which basically means I go out, I go into companies and I show them how to recycle what they could recycle, what we can take at our facility. Our facility has multiple shredders and grinders. So, we take material in from a customer. Resize it, reprocess it into a form so it can be reused. Sometimes that's reused by the customer themselves, creating a circular economy type situation, and sometimes it goes into sort of a down cycle product like it may go into agricultural pipe or a less critical automotive part. So we take things in and ground that stuff up and get it back out into the marketplace to be reused.

Lucie Perrin

Ok so, if I have a question is: when I say sustainability, what does it mean for you?

Tina Green

Well, sustainability as a word is an umbrella in which so many other words live and fight for rank. Sustainability can exist without recycling. Actually, sustainability became a concept after recycling, primarily as a solution to the environmental crisis of the modern generation. The main focus of sustainability is to create processes that are the least harmful to the environment.

Lucie Perrin

OK. So you talk about processes, how your company has developed technology and new processes in order to have a business and sustainability approach?

Tina Green

Well the majority of our processes are human related. We have to have people that do that. Yes. And we just have the equipment as far as technologies goes. We have our equipment is set up with magnets to remove metals. Most everything else is done by visual because we try to keep it all. We don't take in mixed waste. Everything we have has already been sorted and separated, so most of the time visually, some trash or some garbage that's in there, you can visually do that, but the customers are responsible for keeping it separated and sorted. So we don't, we don't have to manually sort a lot. Some we do we, I mean it happens, but yeah.

Lucie Perrin

OK, so you talked about recycling a lot. How do you think recyclability is in the life of people today and how do you think business should involve the recyclability in their everyday operations?

Tina Green

Right. OK, let me take that everyday people part. People are not well educated on what is recyclable and what isn't, and even if they are. We lack in infrastructure to be able to take those recyclable items, so that's something that has to be worked on. And when I said they're not educated, they don't see the importance of it just not being wasteful. I have family members in my own home that I have to say don't put that in there. Put that in here. I mean, and I live with these people, they know what I do. We need, especially here in South Carolina. We need a statewide message that takes this on, but you'll find in South Carolina that the way our counties are divided up, each county does its own thing. There's not a state recognized way to do any of it. Every state can't take the same recyclable materials because they go to different places, so that makes it difficult. If you live, again here in South Carolina, and you travel from one county to another, what you could do in your home county, you may not be able to do in the county you're visiting. So that does make it difficult. We need it. We need a standard in South Carolina and I'm working on that. I'm with the Department of Commerce, so we're working on that. As far as companies goes. I think a lot of the sustainability mandates that they have require them to be sustainable with their materials. The issue there is because these items are commodities, which means there's not a huge return of money to the company for recycling and a lot of times they don't take the time to separate these materials and then it has no value at all. So again, it kind of comes down to education on what can happen, when it can happen, how it should happen. And I just, I don't know how any business now is not recycling. I don't know how they're whether or not. So other than labor, it can be labor intensive and it's training intensive, but if you go ahead and get that out of the way and set up standards, then it can work.

Lucie Perrin

OK, so according to you, it's about education. How do you think business can educate people about recycling?

Tina Green

The word sustainable means to be able to do something repeatedly, over and over and over again until it's right. In large corporations or businesses, it's not about educating once. It has to be a continuous message you have to continually remind and show and that could be to an employee that's been there for 20 years or if you have employee turnover: every time you have a new employee, that training has to take place again. So it's not a one and done thing. You have to continually have it, for lack of better terms in their face. It has to be something that is a standard all the time, and I think a lot of companies think they can just say we're gonna do this and then just walk away and that's not doable.

Lucie Perrin

So how do you measure this effectiveness and the impact that you have with the recyclability of your company? Like how your company measure this effectiveness.

Tina Green

We measure it with data, whether it's ours or whether it's data that we provide to our clients. We provide our clients with data as well and they can track and see based on the ratio of waste to recycling. They can see the trends of whether that's up or down. They can do that that way. For us, it's data as well. Our goal is for everything that we bring into our facility to be recycled, all of it. But again, there's the human element. You do end up with trash and recyclables but we're still at 98% landfill free. We're still only 2% landfill for all the that goes through the facility. So that that's really good. So that's all, it's just data. It's just numbers. That's how we check that impact for us.

Lucie Perrin

Is your company thinking about another way of sustainability? Because you talk a lot about recycle, but there is other way to be sustainable and how your company managed this. Are they just focusing on recycle or they are thinking of other way and new processes?

Tina Green

You know we do because we are just a facility. That's a large part of what we do is the waste that comes in and the lack of waste that goes out the doors we've had. We've gone fluorescent and not fluorescent, but we've gone. We've changed our lighting, so that's happened. So that's dropped our energy bills. Our facility is neither heated nor air conditioned. So, except for the main offices, we don't use a lot of electricity as far as that goes. We keep up our safety standards. When you say that this is just part of our everyday operation, so we don't always hang a tag of sustainability on it.

Lucie Perrin

OK, I understand.

But you mentioned the ethical part, and I think it's a very important part of the sustainability and it's in your everyday operations. So maybe you don't notice it, but about the social and ethical, do you have other points that you want to mention?

Tina Green

Again and because it's part of our everyday, we don't have employee turnover. Our employees stay for a reason. We've got employees that have been there 15 years. I think the least amount of time we have on anyone employee is 3 years. They don't leave. Everyone is treated very well, so we do not have employee turnover.

Lucie Perrin

And how do you think they are motivated in this sustainability? Because as you said, it's your main goal of your company, the sustainability. So how do you think they stay motivated in this job and what motivates them to join Mumford Industries and this sustainability? Do you think they have previously the sustainability in their everyday mind or they wanted to be part of this? How do you think of this?

Tina Green

For us, no, we operate as a manufacturing facility. So, I don't think sustainability was in mind when these employees started. This has been about good working conditions. Being treated well, I mean, there's just good working conditions. Everyone's treated well. I don't think anyone is there specifically to be sustainable.

Lucie Perrin

OK and about you, what motivates you to be part of this sustainable journey?

Tina Green

I don't believe in waste. I am a problem solver at heart, not a salesperson. My goal is to be able to help somebody do better than what they're currently doing and being able to provide the options to be able to do that.

Lucie Perrin

You talked about you are a problem solver. I like this. You probably add encountered challenges. Can you talk about latest challenges or challenges that I've retain your attention?

Tina Green

Yes. The most challenging thing that we have right now is for corporations who say they want to be sustainable, but they don't want to pay anybody to do the job. They want to see a return from the recycling, even though it costs. It costs us to recycle, and the material values are low. That's the challenge right now. It's people getting past. Trying to make they're sustainability or their recycling a profit center. It's not a profit center. It was originally waste. It's still waste, except it's

not going to the landfill. So, getting that message across has been very, very challenging as of late. Because commodity markets have dropped low. So, the value of the materials is low. And corporations? I'm not sure who they think should take on that low pricing, but it puts it in a place where you can't. You can't get it worked out, so it's very difficult right now, very difficult.

Lucie Perrin

And how do you explain them that it's important and they have to pay for this?
And maybe you explain them that they have like an advantage with this. They can gain advantage with recycling. How do you manage to gain like a business that want to recycle and want to be part of this?

Tina Green

Right. You lay it out as a business plan. Basically, you show them currently what they're spending now, what they could save, and what the potential return may be. Sometimes it's only a break even where if you put it in the landfill, it costs this; if you recycle it, it costs this. These two things are even, but it's better to recycle so you can do it that way. You just make a business case for it. It just makes sense, and you can show how equipment may decrease labor costs. Even you know, I've shared statistics about how much happier employees are. If they know that they're doing the right thing and doing a good thing, and that it's easier to retain those employees in a company that's trying to be sustainable.

Lucie Perrin

I like this way of thinking, and if it's a business that is not already involved with you and you want to have a new customer but they don't know anything about sustainability and the recycling, how do you explain it to them?

Tina Green

Well, again, that goes back to the it's all still waste. You can either put it in the landfill, or you can put it here. And if you put it here, you've done the right thing. You've done the sustainable thing. You've met corporate mandates. If you're in a bid situation against another company, these things come into play and be it whether or not you are sustainable. You can use it to your advantage to say that you are doing this. We find that the automotive manufacturers here in South Carolina have requirements from their vendors that they have to do X, that it is part of their bid process, that they will, you know, divert as much material away from the landfill as possible. So when you go into a client, you go : "That's an advantage for you". It's to be able to gain a customer on your end because you're doing the right thing in your facility.

Lucie Perrin

OK. Thank you. If you don't have anything to add, here is my last question: If you were going to give one piece of advice to students like me looking to have an impact on their career, what would it be?

Tina Green

My advice would be to look beyond the philosophy of sustainability. For the physical aspects of what it takes to be sustainable, what is the prospect of goods going to be?

Where they gonna end up? Who's going to manage that? Where is it gonna be managed?

How is it gonna be managed? Get to know those people, get to know the means, not just the other sustainability people. Cause as I mentioned, part of the problem we have is communication. You can have a philosophy at one level, but if there's nobody to carry out the philosophy, it doesn't matter. Somebody has to be physically doing these things. So, if you want to broaden your understanding: get to know those people. Whether it's the people making solar panels or the people recycling solar panels: where do they go?

Whether it's maybe it's the compost guy. Maybe you go visit the compost site in here.

What's the problem for him? Because everybody wants to do it, but nobody knows where it goes and how it gets there. But there is a person that does that. There is a person. Get to know those people, the people that actually holds sustainability up, that actually do the work.

Outro

Thanks for tuning in. I hope you've enjoyed getting to know Tina and learning more about Mumford Industries. Her insights into sustainability and the importance of education in recycling highlight how businesses can significantly impact our environmental future. However, that's all the time we have today. Tune in next episode to hear our guest from BFive40 talk about using recycled materials in the textile industry. Thank you for listening and we will see you next time.

Tag

The Voices of Sustainability Podcast is produced by the Darla Moore School of Business, and production was overseen by Dr. Laura Smith from the USC School of Journalism. This program was also made in partnership with Sustain SC. And last but not least, funding was provided by the Alfred N. and Lynn Manos Page endowment for sustainability in business. Thank you.