

Foreword

As I sit down to write this foreword, I have a lot on my mind. My company, Interface, Inc., has just marked an important milestone—ten years until our target year for Mission Zero, for zero environmental footprint, a goal for which we have set 2020 as our deadline. I'm immensely proud of Interface, and encouraged about our future. At the same time, I have spent the last year dealing with cancer, thankfully holding my own—barely.

You may be familiar with my story (before cancer)—the epiphany I experienced in 1994 when I read Paul Hawken's book, *The Ecology of Commerce*, seeking inspiration for a speech to a task force that was organizing at Interface to answer customer concerns about the environment. That change of worldview led me down a road I had never imagined for myself or my petroleum-intensive company—eventually to get off oil.

Distancing ourselves from the wellhead requires that we reimagine the antiquated, linear, take-make-waste industrial system of which we are all a part. And instead, to become part of a thoughtful, cooperative, cyclical system that mimics nature in the way that we design, source, manufacture, sell, install—and eventually reclaim and recycle—our products. This ambitious undertaking requires new technology, new inputs, and new thinking. It is intensely complicated and, at the same time, completely liberating to think outside the traditional confines of design and manufacturing. Somewhere along the way, the idea that what we were doing was so right—so

right, and so smart—emerged to propel us forward. At Interface, this new way of thinking is working—our products are better than ever, our employees are more engaged than ever, customers are extraordinarily loyal; and, importantly, costs are down, not up, dispelling the myth that sustainability is expensive. That's the story you'll find in more detail in this book.

I've always believed that there was something nagging at the back of my mind in 1994—something that caused me not only to pick up Paul Hawken's book, but also to be taken so forcefully by his ideas. I was, at the time, sixty years old. Ego may say that the nagging sense was a search for my personal legacy, but maybe it was actually conscience—the thing in us that inherently knows right from wrong. Can it possibly be right that we humans are burning up more than a cubic mile of oil each year, as well as mountains of coal, to power our homes, our cars, our offices, and our factories; fuels that took millions upon millions of years to create, and only a few hundred years to exhaust? Inherently, we must know that this is wrong—and stupid. A wise farmer would shake his head and say we were eating our own seed corn. Some capitalists would say we can't afford to do it differently.

But what if those capitalists took into account the value of the services that nature provides? What if the balance sheet and profit-and-loss statement required that we account for the cost of creating air; water purification and distribution (the hydrologic cycle); soil creation and maintenance, thus food; energy and raw materials (at their full costs); climate regulation; pollination; seed dispersal; nutrient cycling; an ultraviolet radiation shield; flood and insect control; and net primary production, the product of photosynthesis? Surely, even the capitalists will know that without any of these, there would be no economy in the first place.

At Interface, the pursuit of sustainability has opened our eyes, not only to how wrong we had it before, but also to the enormous opportunity that new thinking provides.

As we begin the next leg of our journey, looking at the ten years to go and the path before us, one thing is even more clear to me. If we capitalists intend to go on, if we aspire to thrive in a carbon-constrained world and to put down multiple threats—global climate disruption, species extinction, resource depletion, and environmental degradation—we need a new way, a better way, of thinking and acting. Wrong thinking got us into this mess. Eating our own seed corn, as it were, is unsustainable.

The unrepentant capitalist might say, "Business can't afford to have a

conscience.” But I am here to tell you, the farmer was right, and business can’t afford not to have a conscience.

So we have the business case—which I detail in this book—and we have our collective conscience: society’s need to distinguish right from wrong on a local and a global scale.

If that’s not persuasive enough, let’s get personal. Cancer is no fun. If you don’t receive the right treatment, you die; and even with the very best treatment, you can still die. I seem to be receiving the right treatment; though the very best results one can hope for, complete remission (which I am nowhere near yet), leave one knowing it can recur, maybe in a different part of the body as a metastasis, or maybe in a mutated form. It’s difficult not to let cancer take over your life.

As you can imagine, I find some interesting analogies in this experience.

In cancer, it’s often not clear whether the original cause was hereditary or environmental—nature or nurture. My mother was one of seven siblings. My father, too, was one of seven. Not one of those fourteen people who were the generation before mine had cancer. In my generation, my two brothers, one of our first cousins, and I have had cancer. One would tend to think that the probable cause is nurture—something in the environment, not inherited, that got to us. And, of course, “the environment” is, in this case, paradoxically, nurture, not nature. Nurture is what we are exposed to that, perhaps throughout the branch of human evolution that led to us—my generation, our forebears—were never exposed to, at least not in deadly amounts. My forebears, therefore, never had the need to evolve immunity to cancer; so my generation has no inherited immunity—we have the cancer.

But these are not intended to be comments about *my* cancer. These comments—and this book—are about the “cancer” that is attacking the earth, for lack of the right treatment: sincere exercise of responsibility from those responsible for the industrial system. And like human cancer, industrial cancer can take over our lives.

Like my siblings, our cousin, and me, life on the earth is “seeing,” i.e., being exposed to hazards it has not seen in the earth’s entire existence: man-made substances—chemical compounds—that are completely unnatural. Even substances the earth put away in its crust millions, even billions, of years ago through sedimentation and sequestration, allowing a sweet environment conducive to life to evolve up here, are being dug up or drilled up, processed and reintroduced into our surroundings. And the earth’s fragile

ecological balances are constantly abused. By whom? By *homo sapiens*—modern man, doubly wise man, man who knows and knows he knows, and who ought to know better. Conscience again—we cannot afford to ignore its nagging.

So this brings me to the central point of this book; I'll make it now and flesh it out in the book. Irresponsible business—the diggers, the drillers, the processors of poison, all of whom ought to know better—they and their abusive industries—are a cancer on society. Humankind cries out for responsibility to be taken seriously by them and, in fact, by all of industry. To me sixteen years ago, that meant starting with my own company. This book is our story, our response to the imperative: Start here.

It's high time we all started the right treatment of this hateful disease that is inflicted on the earth by us humans before it takes us all down. It's time for the public—the revered marketplace—to say to the institution of business: “You think you can not afford to exercise responsibility and remain competitive. The truth is, you can no longer afford *not* to act responsibly; stop your companies' crimes against nature, for we will run you out of business if you don't. That's the “stick.”

I'll end on a positive note, with an update on Interface's climb up Mount Sustainability—the latest metrics on our eco-odyssey (as of year-end 2009), and a restatement of my central thesis. This is the “carrot”:

- **80 percent** reduction in the landfill waste per unit of production since 1996
- Water intake, down **80 percent** per unit of production since 1996
- Total energy, down by **43 percent** per unit of production since 1996
- With changing energy mix to include renewables, fossil fuel intensity reduced by **60 percent**
- With verified offsets, net GHG reduced **94 percent** (absolute)
- **30 percent** of global energy is from renewable sources
- **36 percent** of total raw materials (by weight) is recycled or bio-based materials
- **100 percent** renewable electricity in Europe (89 percent worldwide) in our factories
- **111 million square yards** of climate-neutral carpet produced since 2003: “Cool Carpet”

- **100,000 tons** (200 million pounds) of reclaimed product via Re-Entry, our reverse logistics carpet reclamation program
- **200 million** airline passenger miles offset by some **106,000 trees**
- Overall footprint reduction, more than **60 percent**
- Cumulative avoided waste costs totaling **\$433 million** since 1994—costs down, not up—waste elimination paying for the entire mountain climb

If we can do it, anybody can. If anybody can, everybody can. That includes you.

RAY C. ANDERSON