

Enough with the greenhushing already: Why we should celebrate Forbes new Sustainability Leaders list

By Wayne Visser

Forbes magazine has just launched its inaugural Sustainability Leaders 2024 list, which it describes as “50 superstar entrepreneurs, scientists, funders, policymakers and activists who are leading the charge to combat the climate crisis with real, tangible impact.” Is this the new face of greenwashing? There is always that danger - and we should remain vigilant - but there are three compelling reasons why I think we should celebrate - rather than denigrate - this new list.

1. Standing up to the anti- movement

First, we are at a challenging moment in the sustainability movement when many hard-won gains are in danger of being lost. The negative lobbying of legacy industries like fossil fuels and livestock farming, allied with a swing to the conservative right in politics, has brought anti-ESG legislation and anti-woke sentiment in the US and corporate sustainability roll-backs in Europe and elsewhere. Progressive companies that fear market and political backlash have reverted to “greenhush” mode, afraid to stand proudly and publicly behind their sustainability credentials. We need to reclaim the public media and mind space.

2. Rekindling solidarity with each other

Second, there are millions of champions for sustainability, all working in their own spheres of influence to make a positive impact - not only on climate, but on nature, human rights, corruption, inequality and countless other issues. However, especially now, many find themselves isolated and marginalised within their own organisations, communities or countries - seemingly swimming upstream against the current of geopolitics and corporate greed. To stay motivated, they need to feel that they are part of an unstoppable movement. And it certainly helps to know that they - or their peers - can still be held up as inspiring role models.

3. Challenging the fringe narrative

Finally, we need to challenge the idea that sustainability is a fringe story. For the past decade, sustainability has mainstreamed. Its themes capture the media headlines every day, and its challenges and opportunities regularly make the agenda in corporate boardrooms and political forums. The Forbes Sustainability Leaders list is a proxy for armies of changemakers in every sector and geography of society (I dislike the military metaphor, but concede that we are in a battle for hearts and minds, a fight to secure a better future). So let's celebrate that these 50 individuals represent grassroots change - everything, everywhere, all at once.

We're all in the game now

By all means, let's remain critical and hold leaders to account for their sustainability promises. But the truth is that we are all players in the game now. None of us is faultless and all of us have a voice, an influence, a responsibility to act. Without a doubt, the game is hotting up, and the stakes for winning and losing couldn't be higher. Which is precisely why this is the moment to come together as a movement - to unite, rather than let those with vested interests in maintaining the status quo divide and conquer. This is the moment for us all to step up. In the faces of these 50 "superstars", see yourself and millions of others reflected. We are the hope. All of us.

Source:

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