

Scott Bernstein Looks for Solutions

What Do You Think of Complainers?

Have you ever had someone tell you that you were doing something wrong? Imagine that you are a ten year old student in a class where the teacher tells you that you never get paper and pencils ready for the day. She yells at you because your work is not finished before recess. Then you find out that she called your parents because you were talking to your best friend during the video that she showed. Next you discover that this teacher told a group of your friends that you had no idea how to do percents, and she just couldn't understand why you didn't work harder. How would you feel? Would you like this teacher? Do you think she wants to help you? I'm sure you really wouldn't like her. Some students might become so frustrated that they would refuse to work anymore in her class. When people hear only bad things about themselves they often think they will never please the person doing the complaining, so they stop trying.

Sometimes people and groups that are trying to help the environment do a lot of complaining. They point out all the things that companies are doing wrong, but they don't try to work with the companies, understand things from their point of view, and offer solutions. Scott Bernstein is a man who realizes the need to work with companies and people to understand their viewpoints and problems. Mr. Bernstein knows that companies have to balance the need to make money with the need for a cleaner environment. He wanted to help them do this. He wanted to find solutions rather than just complain! So he started the Center For Neighborhood Technology (CNT) in Chicago, Illinois.

Starting Small

Mr. Bernstein knew that one way to reduce air pollution in a city is to reduce the amount of power used by homes and

businesses. One of the first things he realized was that there was a need for low cost housing in the city of Chicago. There were many empty apartment buildings in the inner city, but people couldn't afford to rent them. The landlords who owned the buildings had to make some money. So Mr. Bernstein decided that he would help the landlords. He decided that if he showed them ways to reduce energy costs, they wouldn't have to charge so much for rent. Then more people could afford to live in these apartment buildings. Mr. Bernstein and CNT helped landlords by finding ways to lower the amount of energy they use. The CNT also helped landlords get loans to make their buildings more energy efficient.

Mr. Bernstein asked Amoco Corporation to give \$4.7 million dollars to help community buildings save energy. One community center put in better windows, **insulated** their roof, and fixed their boiler controls. This helped them to save 51 percent of the operating budget.

Rather than complaining about high energy use and the pollution that power plants make, Mr. Bernstein is working to help people and companies save the amount of energy they use. When buildings are more energy efficient, people don't have to pay as much for power. Local workers can earn money by working on the improvements to the buildings. People still make money and the environment is helped.

Reducing Commuting Saves Time, Energy, and Money!

We all know that cars, trains, and buses cause harmful pollution. But what can be done about this? One solution is to encourage people to live closer to the places where they work. This had been difficult because it is hard to buy nice homes that people can afford in the city. Mr. Bernstein helps city residents get higher mortgages to buy houses near where they work. Many times people can buy a house in the suburbs that is bigger and costs less. But then they must pay a lot of money to **commute** to their jobs in the city. Mr. Bernstein helped

mortgage companies realize that they can loan more money to people who live close to their workplace because they won't have to pay as much in commuting costs. One study showed that families can save \$4,750 a year if they live near the place they work. This not only saves money, but it reduces air pollution because there is less traffic on the roadways.

Action, Not Complaints!

The dry cleaning industry uses a lot of harmful chemicals and is a source of pollution. The number one chemical used in dry cleaning is called perc for short. Perc is bad for the environment and causes health problems. Rather than talking about all the harmful effects that the dry cleaning business has on the environment, Mr. Bernstein decided to work with dry cleaners to find ways to reduce pollution but still allow cleaning businesses to make money. He heard about a place in London, England that had figured out a way to clean clothes without using **toxic** materials. A chemical engineer from CNT went to London and found out that spot cleaning was done on stains without using harmful chemicals. It required a lot of work, and more people had to be hired. But now the dry cleaners did not have to buy cleaning chemicals, so they saved money on that! This helped people in the city because more local people could get jobs at the cleaners and less pollution was put into the environment.

In fact, CNT developed an alternative clothes cleaning project. They formed a partnership with a private investor to open "The Greener Cleaner." This shop was like a dry cleaners except that they wet cleaned clothes instead of dry cleaning them. Almost all of the clothes brought into "The Greener Cleaner" could be safely wet cleaned even though the labels said, "Dry Clean Only." Now many cleaners in different areas of the United States are trying this process. The Environmental Protection Agency, part of the United States Government, is also looking at how this process can make things safer for us all.

Dominoes

The steps that Mr. Bernstein and CNT are taking to clean up the environment and help the people who live in Chicago may seem like small steps. But, have you ever arranged dominoes so that when you touch one, the whole row falls down? This is what Mr. Bernstein is doing. He is starting a chain of working with individual companies to help them reduce pollution and still make money. Like the dominoes, this work could spread to other cities and people. Soon, more and more people will be looking for practical solutions to our pollution problems that will benefit everyone. Like those dominoes, perhaps pollution will eventually “fall down.”

You're an Expert!

1. Imagine that you are going to present Scott Bernstein with an award for all he has done to help people and the environment. Design an award for him. Write a speech that you could give when introducing him at the award dinner.
2. Ask your teacher or a family member to help you get white label stickers that you can cut apart. Find some dominoes. Trace the domino so you know how much room you have to write.

Write one way an individual person can help the environment on each sticker. (You'll have to write small!) Put the stickers on the dominoes. Set the dominoes up. Then touch one and watch pollution fall down!

Take Action...

Is there someone you know who is doing something to help the environment? Write that person a note of thanks and mail it to them.