



With so many people talking about saving the planet these days, it helps to know which books to read...

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1

The Bridge at the Edge of the World: Capitalism, the Environment, and Crossing from Crisis to Sustainability

By James Gustave Speth (Yale University Press, March 2008)

Dean of the School of Forestry and Environmental Studies at Yale University, former White House advisor and president and founder of the World Resources Institute, James Gustave Speth has been a prominent figure in the environmental movement for some 30 years. Having spent most of his working life dedicated to promoting environmental action, he suggests in his latest book that he – and others like him – have failed because “the current of destruction against which we are swimming is simply too swift”. Speth argues that if we are to maintain a liveable planet and avoid imminent catastrophe, then the direction of this “current” must be altered; the challenge, however, is that the current he speaks of is “the untouchable edifice of American-style consumer capitalism”. While he recognises the value of capitalism in its ideal form, he makes a compelling case that our obsession with consumption and GDP growth now causes more harm – to environment, social fabric and world security – than benefit.

In his book, Speth seeks to provide the groundwork for the kind of system that is needed to replace the existing failed model of global capitalism. While he worries that the current “knee-jerk scramble to fire up the stalling engines of economic growth leaves little room for big-picture assessment”, he is encouraged that there is an increasing number of like-minded prominent thinkers also advocating a change in minds and an increasing interest among young people and others in finding radical new solutions.

2

The Power of Unreasonable People: How Social Entrepreneurs Create Markets that Change the World

By John Elkington and Pamela Hartigan (Harvard Business Press, February 2008)

Authors John Elkington, of Sustainability, and Pamela Hartigan, of the Schwab Foundation for Social Entrepreneurship, provide a well-informed review of the mindset and strategies of some of the world's most unconventional entrepreneurs. In an engaging read, the authors argue that a new breed of “social entrepreneurs” is bringing a changed mindset to the market that contributes to solving some of the world's most pressing problems while at the same time creating exciting new market opportunities. The book takes us into the minds of some of the world's most inspiring social entrepreneurs across a range of sectors – including finance, health care, technology, the environmental industry, engineering and education – and considers how their activities might impact the global market.

The title of the book is inspired by George Bernard Shaw, who argued: “The reasonable man adapts himself to the world, the unreasonable one persists in trying to adapt the world to himself. Therefore all progress depends on the unreasonable man.” If this book is to be believed, our future may well depend on the success of this new breed of “unreasonable” entrepreneurs, those who are prepared to radically disrupt existing industries, value chains and business models, and in so doing help us to develop more sustainable models for doing business.



3

Making Sustainability Work: Best Practices in Managing and Measuring Corporate Social, Environmental and Economic Impacts

By Marc J. Epstein (Greenleaf Publishing, January 2008)

Marc Epstein – business academic, author and consultant to numerous top companies – has produced a comprehensive guide for corporate strategists, academics and sustainability consultants, on implementing and evaluating corporate sustainability initiatives. Building on his previous and respected work, his latest book combines a grounding in academic research with extensive examples of best practices from almost 100 organisations worldwide, including prominent companies such as Canon, Coca-Cola, Dell, FedEx, General Mills, Johnson & Johnson, Nestlé, Starbucks, and Warner Brothers. The book is a valuable source of practical recommendations for implementing sustainability goals in both large and small companies. It examines the relationship between sustainability strategies and profitability, and outlines various management strategies, control systems and measurement tools aimed at fully integrating sustainability into strategic planning and business practice. His examples cover a range of different business sectors and countries.



4

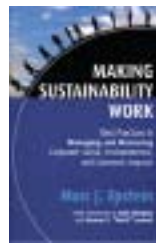
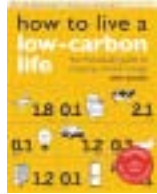
How to Live a Low-Carbon Life: The Individual's Guide to Stopping Climate Change

By Chris Goodall (published by Earthscan, 2007)

Described by *New Scientist* as “the definitive guide to reducing your carbon footprint”, and winner of the 2007 Clarion award for non-fiction, this timely book provides a comprehensive reference guide on how to accurately calculate and reduce your individual greenhouse gas emissions.

Examining a range of daily activities – such as cooking, travel and the use of home appliances – Chris Goodall's handy little book provides a series of easy-to-use tables that outline how we can each individually reduce our carbon emissions from a (Western) average of 12.5 tons per year to a more sustainable three tons per annum. While written for a largely UK audience, most of the advice is directly replicable in South Africa, where it will be particularly valuable given our local context of energy insecurity and climate vulnerability.

The book is supported with updated information on the accompanying website www.lowcarbonlife.net



5

Sudden and Disruptive Climate Change: Exploring the Real Risks and How We Can Avoid Them

By Michael C. MacCracken, Frances Moore and John C. Topping, Jr. (Earthscan, December 2007)

Written by a group of internationally respected researchers, this book suggests that sudden and disruptive climate change might be a far more likely scenario than the recent reports of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) suggest. The book explores the potential for catastrophic climate change impacts, assesses the significance of these impacts, and outlines some of the efforts required to limit them. While changes in emissions and atmospheric concentrations of greenhouse gases are projected to be slow and smooth, the intensity and impacts of climate change on the environment and society could be very abrupt and erratic. They argue that surprising and non-linear responses are increasingly likely to occur as warming exceeds certain thresholds, resulting in relatively rapid and very disruptive changes in the Greenland and West Antarctic ice sheets, dramatic changes in precipitation intensity and patterns, coastal inundation, increased occurrence of wildfires, and profound changes in the ranges of plant and animal species.



6

About Time: Speed, Society, People and the Environment

Edited by Tim Aldrich, Forum for the Future (Greenleaf Publishing, September 2005)

About Time brings together ten of the world's leading thinkers and writers – including Will Hutton, Baroness Mary Warnock, Sir Martin Rees, Ghilleen Prance, Jay Griffiths and Jonathon Porritt, from disciplines including biology, business, sociology, ethnography, philosophy, history and sustainability – in a collection of inspirational essays that explore the issue of time and its relationship to the environment, economy and society. Challenging us to question our current idolatry of “busyness”, the authors contend that the achievement of sustainability requires us to change our understanding of time. They suggest that we are increasingly unhitched from natural rhythms and from nature's need for slow change and replenishment, and that our current addiction to speed is negatively affecting our health, the quality of family and personal life, and the natural environment: “The faster we live, the faster we consume, the faster we waste energy and the faster we pollute the planet.” Ironically, despite all the machinery designed to save time, we seem to be running out of time at an ever-increasing rate.

The first half of the collection of essays consists of a series of ‘think-pieces’ that examine different dimensions of time, from the history of time as a social phenomenon and cultural notions of time, to cosmological time and the difference between human and machine time. These are followed by some more practical, solutions-oriented contributions examining issues such as the slow food movement, time banks and the need for long-term thinking in politics and business. **N**

7

The New Energy Book for Urban Development in South Africa

By Sarah Ward (Sustainable Energy Africa, updated 2008 edition)

In the context of Eskom's rolling black-outs, and with increasing evidence that we need to ‘decarbonise’ the global and national economy, *The New Energy Book* is a particularly timely publication. Written by Sarah Ward, a Cape Town-based urban

planner and the founder and former director of Sustainable Energy Africa, this is a valuable and extensive revision of her 1999 publication. Addressing issues such as access to energy, sustainable transport, energy-

efficient housing and energy planning, this is a comprehensive and practical handbook that seeks to encourage the adoption of sustainable energy practices in the South African urban environment. The local case studies, illustrations,

stark statistics and practical suggestions are laid out in a manner that is accessible and engaging to a wide audience interested in sustainable energy, including urban planners, policy makers, teachers, students and the general public.