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Fewer freebies, more veggies for office workers to go green

By [Ernest Chan](#) May 29, 2019

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As environmental, social, and governance-related investing enters the mainstream, asset management professionals can take a few simple steps to integrate ESG into their own working lives. But going green is more than just having a recycling bin at the office or using stainless steel straws, experts say.



Fanny Moritz, NO!W No Waste

Fanny Moritz, Hong Kong-based founder of online zero-waste shop NO!W No Waste, says many people have the wrong idea when it comes to green practices, including the belief that recycling is the most effective way to be more green.

"Recycling is not the solution [...]. Less than 5% of all we've thrown away since recycling began has been recycled – that's nothing," Moritz says.

Instead of relying on inefficient office recycling programmes, Moritz focuses on the principles of refusing, reducing and reusing. And one of her suggestions strikes at a key aspect of the asset management world – freebies.

Rare is the asset management event that takes place without myriad cheap giveaways, be it calendars, pens or USB sticks – but how much do you really need these items? asks Moritz.

"Say no to freebies, even eco-friendly [ones] – in the end it's still consuming," she says.

If a company really wants to offer freebies, you as the recipient can refuse it, she says, or you can set up a donation box at your office where people can leave these gift items for others to use.

"In the end, it's all about reusing what we have as much as possible," says Moritz.

The impact of food

In addition to cutting out industry freebies and encouraging a culture of reusing items in the office, people can also make an impact by eating more plant-based foods.

Mandy Wong, nutritionist and partnership development manager at Hong Kong social enterprise Green Monday, says: "When [people] think of environmental action, they have to reduce something or recycle something, but they don't think about food.

In fact, having a more plant-based diet may actually be the most efficient way for an individual to incorporate environmental sustainability into their work lives, she adds.

Going entirely plant based every day for a year saves on 1.5 tons of carbon emissions, spares 477 cows, chickens and pigs, and saves enough water for 805 people, according to the United Nations. Of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals outlined by the UN, choosing a plant-based diet fulfils 11 of them, says Wong.



Mandy Wong, Green Monday

Green Monday encourages people to go meat free just once a week, but in the lunch and afternoon tea-obsessed offices around Hong Kong, where there is a strong culture of eating lunch together and ordering in afternoon snacks as a group, once a week is enough to make a difference, she adds.

For office workers who **prefer** to eat at their desk or in the pantry, or if the office has a canteen, setting up a food waste bin would be a good way to be more green as well, says NO!W No Waste's Moritz.

"You can work with local organisations that come and collect the food waste, and give it to farmers to create compost," she says.

Other green office practices

Reducing e-waste or digital waste is often overlooked by office workers, Moritz adds, but there is an environmental cost to storing your **e-mails**, documents and other files on cloud servers.

She recommends deleting emails once you have read them and unsubscribing from the emails you do not actually read, as well as using more old-fashioned methods of communication in the office.

"If you need to send an email to a colleague, just speak to her if she's next to you – do you really need to send an email every two minutes if she is two seats away," says Moritz.

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Finally, there is a lot of business travel within the asset management world, so people can try to fly less for work, she says, or if they really need to fly they can spend a little more money to pay for a carbon footprint offset.

Individual impact limits



Tony Wong, Ayala Consulting

well as the company itself.

"It makes life so much easier if the property management company is able to, for example, set up recycling bins in a convenient area and have some sort of education for office workers on how to do clean recycling," he says.

The company itself can set up an internal green committee that can raise awareness internally, as well have someone responsible for procuring more environmentally friendly office equipment, he adds.

Still, sustainability experts are optimistic about the prospects of greener office environments.

"In Hong Kong, we are very bad with recycling and that's a fact, but when there is a need for Hong Kong to change, the change happens fast – so much faster than in Europe," says NOIW No Waste's Moritz.

When we talk to companies about green issues, it seems they are more willing to accept what we are saying, confirms Green Monday's Wong, and they are starting to think about what actions they can actually do within their workplace.

Alaya Consulting's Wong says there is definitely more awareness of green issues today compared with five years ago and people are more open to doing something about it, especially among younger workers.

"They are more willing to accept these green initiatives – actually they are quite happy to do it compared with many [older workers]," he says.

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