

Sustainability ambassadors: Interview

Kathrin Menges, Executive Vice President of Human Resources and Chair of the Henkel Sustainability Council, discusses the Sustainability Ambassador Program and shares her personal experience as an ambassador.

(Quotes may be used without prior permission)

Why did Henkel start the Henkel Ambassador Program?

At Henkel we have always had a strong focus on sustainability. Nonetheless, we felt there was a need to strengthen employees' awareness and commitment to making individual contributions to sustainability in their daily lives. So we launched the Ambassador Program in 2012 to train our employees on the principles of sustainable development and on Henkel's sustainability strategy in a very interactive and fun way. Through the program, we can engage our colleagues as sustainability ambassadors, who then raise awareness among others, e.g. co-workers, suppliers, customers, consumers and students. Since launching the program in 2012, Henkel has trained more than 3,800 ambassadors in 70 countries.

Why is raising sustainability awareness important for Henkel?

If we want to continue to live well and within the means of the planet, we need to understand that each of our individual decisions and behaviors contributes significantly to the amount of energy, water and other resources that we consume. However, many people are still unaware of their personal impacts. Therefore, we need to raise awareness that each and every contribution matters and learn how to use resources more efficiently in order to achieve more with less. We need everyone's commitment, if we want to achieve our goal of tripling the value that we create compared with the environmental footprint of our products and technologies by 2030.

Why encourage ambassadors to visit schools?

We encourage ambassadors to visit schools because we want the next generation to understand how to use resources efficiently from an early age. We, as adults, are accustomed to certain habits whereas children are still open to learning new things. Children can become a great multiplier by persuading their families to make more sustainable choices in their daily lives.

Our ambassadors enjoy visiting schools and meeting with students, who are motivated and excited about making a contribution to a more sustainable planet. Their enthusiasm is contagious. I think that's a big part of the reason why Henkel ambassadors have already presented the topic of sustainability to more than 36,000 primary school students in 37 countries.

Are you involved personally?

Yes, it is critical to set a positive tone at the top of the organization. Several members of the Henkel Management Board – including Kasper Rorsted, Bruno Piacenza and myself – have visited elementary schools as part of the Ambassador Program. Speaking with the students was a great experience. It was amazing to see how interested the students are and how eager they are to make a difference. They have lots of creative ideas.

What is the next step?

Henkel will continue rolling out the Ambassador Program globally through 2015. There are almost 50,000 Henkel employees worldwide, and they can all play a role in conserving resources.

In addition to the successful schools visits, we have also initiated a “(Y)our Move” program that highlights five areas where we can serve as role models in the office by acting more sustainably i.e. Saving Energy, Sustainable Healthy Food, Sustainability Donating Events, Smart Printing. These dimensions offer employees the opportunity to choose where they can have the biggest individual impact for greater sustainability at work and also at home. Piloting this program turned out to be a great success and we plan to further rollout the “(Y)our Move” program in 2015.

Furthermore, Henkel will intensify its collaboration with partners along the value chain. Working with retail partners, for example, Henkel plans to engage more consumers on the topic of sustainability and explain how products can be used in an environmentally responsible way.