

Voices of Sustainability: Season 1, Episode #9

Phillip Schlies

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Intro

Hello and welcome, I'm Phillip Schlies and you are listening to the Voices of Sustainability Podcast. Join us as we delve into the various strategies and challenges faced by the government, businesses, and non-profits, all striving to balance economic growth with environmental and social responsibility.

This season from the University of South Carolina, our reporters are all business majors at the Darla Moore School of Business with a concentration in sustainability. They'll be talking with various organizations to highlight how they're working to improve the world we live in and conserve our natural resources.

To explore the topic of sustainability, the episodes will explore how each person being interviewed defines sustainability, how the success of sustainability initiatives are measured in their organization, the motivations to be sustainable, and how to have a positive impact in your career. The conversations also provide insights into topics such as, circular economy and recycling, innovation and technology in sustainability, as well as regulation and policy that are influencing this space.

On today's episode, our reporter Lorenzo Aparicio will be speaking with Scott Hicks, the Sustainability Manager at Mark Anthony Brewing. Mark Anthony Brewing is the fourth largest brewer in the United States and provides supply chain management and brewing services for many of America's top alcohol brands. Stay tuned as Scott shares insights into their initiatives, challenges, and the future of sustainability in brewing. Let's get into it.

Script

Lorenzo Aparicio

Hello, my name is Lorenzo Aparicio. So, I would like to start with some warm-up questions. Could you please introduce yourself, detailing your current role, your responsibilities in Mark Anthony Brewing, and your journey into this field?

Scott Hicks

Okay, yeah, my name is Scott Hicks. I have been with Mark Anthony Brewing for two years. My role at the company at the Columbia brewery is the environmental health, safety, and security

manager. My job really entails managing the day-to-day operations of our facility from a compliance standpoint around environmental and safety compliance so I think EPA, OSHA, as well as the site security function, and then really injury prevention, making sure that people have the processes procedures and training to do the job safely, so that everyone goes home safe, and then that we're not polluting the environment or disturbing our neighbors so that's basically the gist of my job. I have, I'm a part of the Mark Anthony Brewing sustainability team. We don't have one sole owner of that, of that group, like a sustainability manager rather we lead it by team, with the help of consultants, but several of our team members in Columbia, as well as the other two breweries in our corporate group make up that sustainability team so what we do in that field, primarily as part of our team, as we come together monthly to discuss topics around our efforts to improve sustainability at the breweries, and at our corporate level so that's really kind of the high level overview of my job and my role in sustainability.

Lorenzo Aparicio

Interesting. Well, briefly in your own words, what does sustainability mean to you?

Scott Hicks

That's a good question so sustainability for me, it means. That's a good question. I would say that means we are managing the resources of today to ensure that future generations are able to live a comfortable life, a life of not without scarcity of natural resources, right. So, we are good stewards of the environment to help create that better tomorrow. I don't know if it's a, it's a great tagline but basically managing today for a better tomorrow.

Lorenzo Aparicio

Exactly. Yeah, so good question. I got that one also, it was kind of hard. So, let's move on. Let's talk a little bit more about your thoughts and your opinions. So, what motivates you to continue pursuing sustainability within Mark Anthony Brewing?

Scott Hicks

Well, I think, from a corporation standpoint, it's really, you want to be, you want to show your customers that you're doing the right things, things the right way by not just being wasteful with resources so we use an absolute ton of water, right. Our products are water, mostly. So it's important that we manage that resource. So, we're not directly impacting everyone else in South Carolina. And if we are, if we have to report these numbers and show these numbers to other people, it holds us accountable to managing that. So, I think it's important for any company to conduct business, ethically, and this is what I look at it from a sustainability side it's kind of an ethics side, we don't pollute the environment we don't create just a ton of waste that we don't have to. We're conscious of our natural resource usage. So it is because I take that same approach in my personal life. Right. I don't just, you know, throw everything in the garbage I recycle. I try to do things the right way so it's important for me to work for a company that embodies those same principles.

Lorenzo Aparicio

Yeah, I agree. So, how do you stay informed about trends and practices in sustainability?

Scott Hicks

So here in South Carolina, we are members of a group called Sustain SC. I'm a part of one of their leadership initiatives as well, which I think is how we end up getting interconnected, and they regularly keep us updated through email through newsletters, things like that. And then also, as part of our monthly sustainability team meetings. We partner with Ernst and Young to help us with our sustainability journey, and they provide us with a lot of insights from the food and Bev industry, and just general legislation and things that are happening so that's how I would say I keep updated.

Lorenzo Aparicio

Yeah. Okay, let's move on. Let's talk more about the company itself. Could you explain how Mark Anthony Brewing incorporates sustainability into its business operations and product development?

Scott Hicks

Yeah, so we have a corporate utilities manager who has projects every year to reduce energy usage at all three breweries. We track all of our metrics around natural gas consumption, water consumption waste. So, we're constantly evaluating and measuring that comparing it to the industry average. And we also utilize recycled materials in our packaging we just recently received an award from a company called West Rock, where we just hit some milestones I can't regurgitate it exactly but basically the bulk of our packaging for the cases of white claw is made from recycled paper in our facility here in Columbia. We recycle all cardboard all aluminum cans, all glass, all shrink wrap. We actually take some of our shrink wrap, send it back to the manufacturer to be incorporated into new material. So, and what that does, you know, it's a great Oh, we're great for the environment. Yeah!, yeah! but it's also a cost savings to the business so it makes good business sense to do it on top of it's the right thing to do so there's benefits both ways.

Lorenzo Aparicio

Yeah. Following the same line. How does the company measure the impact and effectiveness of its sustainability initiatives?

Scott Hicks

That's hard to say how we how we measure the impact other than easily quantifiable things. So, so, again, when we track our metrics, we can say we recycled, you know, 99% of our waste, and then we look at it from a. What would it cost to landfill that waste versus, what do we get, you know, pay back and credits for the recycling effort, and same thing with energy consumption we can say, a cost of natural gas per unit produced, and how effective is that year over year so are we producing more with less. And how do we quantify that so that's how we would measure. If we're doing well, or if we've got opportunities. And I think that's part of when we track those

metrics, that's what our corporate utilities manager, he puts together executive reports so our company leadership can see how we're performing.

Lorenzo Aparicio

Moving forward. Let's talk about some sustainability challenges. What are some sustainability projects and Mark Anthony brewing that you are particularly proud of?

Scott Hicks

Yeah, so one of the things that that we did or have done at our site. We've got a very large site of about 160 acres. We've created, an employee park, about 26 acre park with outdoor space. We've added bluebird boxes screech owl boxes, and a pollinator garden. So really it's enhancing the, the wildlife, or setting aside property that could be used for manufacturing but instead is being used for habitat enrichment, and that's a big project that we kicked off it also is. It's an open space for employees to be a green space for employees to be healthy. There are walking trails. There's disc golf. So, it's a really great feature that we've really enhanced over the last two years here.

Lorenzo Aparicio

Awesome. What do you see as the biggest sustainability challenges into the brewing industry? And how is my Anthony brewing addressing them?

Scott Hicks

Some of it is the cost of implementation. So you think about everyone wants to talk about solar or alternative energy, things like that, or green energy. The upfront capital costs and return on investment. It's not very good. The payoff in the long run is there, and it might be the right thing to do, but it's, it's not cost effective upfront. So those are challenges when you think about big item projects. And then on top outside of that from, from, if you're just looking at a cost standpoint, it would be the, the attitudes, the general attitudes of, or the behaviors of our population in general. So it's a little bit challenging to get our, employees to every day, kind of live and think sustainably. When, when the US as a society is one of a throwaway culture, right. So how do you get people to care about recycling. And that's been a challenge, I think. Now, I think we've done a pretty decent job, but, but there's a lot of room for opportunity there to really engage and foster that, that change in culture mindset and in corporate America in general. But, our employees getting them, to recycle things, to buy sustainable, like if you think about, think about it from a break room area. If we were going to offer, you know, food that was sustainably sourced, but it costs \$2 more. Are people going to buy it just because, so how do we, how do we drive some of those behaviors that we're trying to develop? So it's been a bit of a challenge.

Lorenzo Aparicio

Yeah, it is. And now that you mentioned this, that was the following question, basically, how does the company engage with its customers and the community on sustainability issues?

Scott Hicks

Yeah, the customer, from the customer standpoint, I can't really answer that because I don't see, maybe more of a marketing question. I don't know that we do a great job of advertising all the great things. You know, we're a private company, so things are done a little bit differently. In a private company versus a public company, you want shareholders to know everything about all the great things you're doing. Private companies, it doesn't really matter. It's whatever the owner wants to do, right? So I don't really know how we advertise or how effectively we're advertising all the great things that we do. From locally though, being a part of this sustainability initiative, we bring people to the site. You know, we talk to members of the community about all the great things that we're doing. So we try to educate the local community, or at least the local business community on all the great things that we're doing. But yeah, it would be nice for the customers to kind of see all the great things that we're doing.

Lorenzo Aparicio

Yeah, exactly. Let's jump to the advice section. Looking forward, what are the next big steps for sustainability in the beverage industry? And how does Mark Anthony Brogan plan to contribute?

Scott Hicks

Yeah, I think the next big steps really are around those energy management systems, right? It's how can we produce more by using less and what innovation do we need to capitalize on, whether it's water-saving technologies? Really, I think probably a bigger thing more is you think about wastewater, right? How do we effectively manage wastewater treatment? And this doesn't apply to our plant here, but we do have a facility in Glendale, Arizona. And they're looking at ways to treat our wastewater and re-inject it into a groundwater aquifer, right? So basically replenish the aquifer with water that's basically processed water waste. So that would be a huge, huge sustainability win for us. But as a company, becoming more efficient with our energy and water usage, I think it's finding opportunities to utilize more recycled materials. I talked about the paper from Westrock, the packaging our cases come in. But think about shrink wrap and think about cans. How can we increase that recycled content of all the material? And then ultimately, how do we market all the great things that we're doing to help drive maybe consumer knowledge and sales? And then grow as a business and then continue to do these sustainability practices at a larger scale.

Lorenzo Aparicio

Yeah. To finish this advice part, if you were to give one piece of advice to a student looking to make an impact in their careers, especially in sustainability, what would it be?

Scott Hicks

Well, I think it would be to get out and see how things are made, right? It's easy to think that everyone should be, oh, we should just be using nothing but green energy. Well, then you go out and try to run a paper mill on green energy. It's not easy, right?

Lorenzo Aparicio

Yeah.

Scott Hicks

So really getting to see the whole process. And I'm talking sustainability really from an environmental and natural resource usage. But you could also see getting out and seeing how things are made, how people work, how people interact in manufacturing. And it would give them an opportunity to maybe see how real world applications impact those sustainability metrics. And hopefully it gives you ideas on taking the knowledge that you're gaining now and the technologies that are being developed and really having a better idea of how to implement those things and understanding where the challenges are. Because maybe the challenge for a lot of places isn't energy uses, but it's water consumption. And the whole time you spend thinking about how we can put solar on. And really, that's not a big issue for us. We don't use a lot of electricity. We use a ton of water. So if you're trying to get into food and bed, maybe that's where you focus.

Lorenzo Aparicio

Yeah, I read about that.

Scott Hicks

And then other things about, you know, sustainability is this broad category these days of it includes DEI and ESG, right? You think about the environment and then social aspects and the governance aspect. You might see how corporations treat their employees, what the engagement is, what work-life balance looks like. It's easy to say those and try to guess at those things when you're in college and think you know how the world works.

Scott Hicks

But man, when you get out there and you see how things work. So I would say look for opportunities to do internships or just tours of industries that you would like to be a part of. And really ask a lot of questions because there's a lot of people willing to help. And I think that'd give you a leg up in that journey.

Lorenzo Aparicio

Yeah, well, I think that's all I have. Thank you for sharing your valuable insights with me today. Your experience and perspectives have been incredibly enlightening. Do you have any final thoughts or messages you would like to share? One final thought or anything?

Scott Hicks

No, I would just say sometimes it's an uphill battle, right? You can't change the world in a day. And maybe it's hard to think how one person can change the world. But as long as you're pushing the right message and walking the talk and doing things the right way, I think you're going to make a difference. And I think you will impact those around you.

Outro

Thanks for tuning in. I hope you've enjoyed getting to know Scott and learning more about Mark Anthony Brewing. They're attitude and application of sustainability is inspiring. Their practices to ensure safety, waste reduction, and community involvement sets high standards for other businesses. However, that's all the time we have today. Tune in next episode to hear our guest from Milliken and Co. discuss green initiatives that are reshaping our world and inspiring the next generation. Thank you for listening and we will see you next time.

Tag

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