Green Office Program Myth Debunking Guide

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An office's participation in the Green Office Program is meant to make the office more sustainable by changing their practices. As fellows it is part of our responsibility to give them the recommendations and strategies that they need to improve. The checklist is our main tool however we are not able to monitor each person in an office, nor their daily practices and we have to rely on the office's Eco-leader to be knowledgeable and honest. Considering that we have limited time and interactions with each office during the semester we need to be as effective as possible in that time. One opportunity for you to make those interactions effective is to identify, address, and effectively refute common myths surrounding Green Office practices.

Myths are tricky as they stem from many sources of misinformation or misinterpretation, however the propagation of a myth - if you know the truth - is easy to identify in the moment.

This guide contains strategies to help debunk common Green Office myths as well as strategies to help you be effective in identifying excuses and in addressing real issues that often come up as a fellow.

**Remember that anyone can be an Eco-leader and that they can have varying backgrounds in sustainability as well as varying intentions as an Eco-leader. The same contexts can be applied to individual people in each office. In addition to the different mindsets of Eco-Leaders, they may hold different positions within each office; most often they are the office manager, or secretary, but can also be faculty members or agents of the department. This difference can be important for understanding the breadth and depth of knowledge they may have about their office, and what kind of power and influence they hold in advancing their office's sustainability practices.

Why Do Myths Stick?

It is often assumed that misconception is due to a lack of information, called the "Information Deficit Model". Providing correct or new information is an intuitive solution, however providing too much information can lead to 'backfire' effects that strengthen the influence of a myth in a person's mind. These backfire effects are observed when making a myth more familiar, giving too many or confusing arguments, or threatening a person's worldview.

> ➢ Stating the myth increases familiarity and the chances of the person accepting information as true. This is particularly strong among adults, and is the most common backfire effect. Focus on the facts and mention the myth as little as possible. If possible do not begin with common phrases like, "you may think that myth" or "myth is a common misconception". These phrases emphasize the myth and highlight it in the conversation.
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> ➢ Processing many or difficult-to-comprehend arguments takes more effort than myths that tend to be simple and easy to digest. Also, people can feel alienated by jargon or long, drawn out paragraphs of explanation. To reduce this, debunking arguments and information should be easy to read and process, and should employ succinct language.
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> ➢ Some myths simply fit or do not fit with one's morals, values, and sense of cultural identity. In this context we must be cognizant of biases and how those biases can lead a person to seek to confirm their views, or argue, that which contradicts them. If the true information goes against their views in a way, our efforts are better spent on those that are less fixed in their beliefs.

Even when given the correct people will continue to be influenced by misinformation. "The Continued Influence Effect" states that when presented with a contradiction or a correction, our mind fails to edit the information we already have stored, including interpretations or inferences. A causal gap occurs when a correction is made to information that was identified as, or used to create and inference to explain, a cause and effect relationship without convincingly replacing that causal explanation. People will default to an incorrect explanation over an incomplete explanation.

Steps to an Effective on-the-spot Debunking

Compiled into one strategy, the elements of an effective correction are; core facts, explicit warnings, an alternative explanation, and clear presentation. The refutation of misinformation should emphasize clear and simple key facts. Anytime the myth is mentioned, note *before* presenting it, that it is misinformation. The key facts should give an alternative, plausible and complete explanation for causation. Explanation of why the myth is wrong, or explaining the use of rhetorical techniques that influenced the myth such as cherry picking or fake experts can also be employed. Finally, any information presented should be, if possible, shown in aesthetically pleasing and digestible methods such as graphs or other visuals.

These steps are intended as a strategy for refuting myths as identified during walkthroughs in reference to checklist criteria.

1. **Quickly identify the source of the misinformation**
   a. What is the incorrect information built into the myth?
   b. Why does this myth exists? What does it explain?
   c. Is there another causal explanation that you can provide?
2. **Decide on a strategy**
   a. What key facts are essential and how will you state them?
   b. What causal explanation will you provide to fill the gap created by exposing the myth?
3. **State the facts**
   a. Keep it simple by avoiding jargon and long-winded explanations
4. **Identify the Myth - without emphasizing it**
   a. Use explicit warnings that you are about to state incorrect information
   b. Do not state the incorrect information unless necessary
5. **Fill the gap**
   a. Provide an alternative explanation as soon as possible to replace the incorrect explanation
   b. Identify what might have caused the misinformation (technology development, cherry picking of information, false experts)
6. **Follow up**
   a. Graphs and visuals are succinct and aesthetically pleasing ways of debunking myths, but likely not to be available to you in the moment. In addition to your explanation, provide visuals that can back up your alternative post-walkthrough
   b. Emphasize the message of the visual, not the myth you intend it to refute

Examples

Here are a few common myths that past fellows have come across and how to address them;

Computer Shut Downs

Myth: Shutting down computers at the end of the day and booting them back up again in the morning takes more energy than it does to keep them on sleep mode for the night.

Fact: Starting up a computer uses the same amount of energy as letting it run for 3 minutes. Supporting Facts: Turning computers off at night can save an average of 172 Kwh ($250) a year. Computers are designed to handle, on average, 40,000 on/off cycles before a failure.

Causal Explanation: Technology has come a long way in a short period of time. Computers take considerably less energy to start up now than they did when they became the standard for offices.

Composting

Myth: If a compost bin is in the office, the room will smell and it will attract bugs.

Fact: Composting is a safe and sustainable way of disposing organic material.
Supporting Facts: The use of biobags, carbon filters, and tight-fitting lids minimizes smells, as they would in the average trash bin. Bins can be stored in the refrigerator or freezer if your office experiences fruit flies. Another alternative is to place a trap for fruit flies, which can be done with some dish detergent and apple cider vinegar.

Causal Explanation: Compost bins are often improperly cared for, and not emptied often enough. Just as with trash, they need to be emptied regularly and maintained.

Car Idling

Myth: It takes more gas to shut off and restart the engine than to just leave the car running if its only for a few minutes.

Fact: If left idling more than 10 seconds, it is more efficient to stop and restart the car.
Supporting Facts: It takes more gas, and produces more pollution to idle than to turn off and restart your car.

Causal Explanation: Massachusetts has an anti-idling law for this purpose. This can also be addressed from the jump in technology, similar to computer shut downs.

Sources

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