



2

....

# Know What You Value

Three weeks of information  
I never had before have changed  
forty years of ingrained driving  
habits... I didn't have to change  
my values. I just had to see  
how my action did and did not  
conform to my values.

**DONELLA H. MEADOWS**, *The Global Citizen*



**DON'T WANT** you to just read about sustainability; I want you to enact it. One of the best ways I know to do that is to link sustainable actions to what you already value. If sustainability measures reinforce what you value today, then pursuing them is like an amuse-bouche served at a fine dining restaurant: a delightful, satisfying morsel that adds to your dinner experience.

We all organize our lives around the internal values we have, whether stated or not. These are ideas, things, people, and even practices we hold dear. Below are some examples:

- I prize sleeping eight hours a night because good sleep keeps me happy and healthy.
- I read to my kids every night before bed because it instills a love of reading.
- I call my mom daily because I want her to know that I love her.
- We eat as a family nightly because it builds a strong family unit.

Of course, our value system extends beyond ourselves and our immediate family.

- I shop at farmers markets because I want to support local businesses in my community.
- I plant native trees and flowering plants on my property to support my state's local pollinators.
- I don't water my lawn in the hot summer months because it's important to conserve freshwater resources.

And like life itself, our value systems can shift and change. What we held as important in our teenage years may be different in our mid-thirties. Our values will continue to expand and refine as we move through marriage, parenting, and our advancing career. Some of our values will remain fixed throughout our life; others will be newly acquired. As we grow and learn, we take on new mantles and let others fall away.

I'd argue that sustainability is much like learning a new subject matter, whether in a formal academic setting or as a new hobby, like playing the piano or crocheting. We learn and practice but keep it simple at first. We build up our finger muscles and memorize the feeling of the hook in our hands and the knots that form a weave. We master basic ditties on the ivory keys with one hand before we add the other to support a richer melody. As we gain comfort in our crocheting ability, we progress our knowledge and challenge ourselves to move from crafting a straight scarf to a rounded hat. The progression of our learning and understanding is validated by our growing confidence and the sophistication of our capabilities.

We know more. We try more. We gain confidence. We progress our knowledge. We apply our learning in deeper, more meaningful ways.

The "test" for us is seeing the results of our efforts.

## **Your Sustainability Lens**

.....

If you were a photographer hired to take photos of a special occasion, how would you best capture the moment? Would you shoot in color or black and white? Would you take still shots or video? Would you capture scenes as a photojournalist would—fluid and unexpected—or more as a portraitist, formally choreographing images? Would you use a digital camera or go old-school and use an analog Nikon?

You have a gut feeling about your aesthetic preferences. You may consider a couple different approaches, but you generally know what you like and what you would prioritize.

The same goes for picking our value-driving preferences. Can you articulate which of the following drivers ring true for you? (There can be multiple that resonate.) Which one would you consider a motivating factor for taking sustainability action in your life and with your family? I have identified four value drivers:

- 1 Saving money
- 2 Living a healthy life
- 3 Building community
- 4 Supporting the biodiversity of the planet

For each, an avatar based on a real person is presented to give you a sense of how your personal values align with sustainability measures you could take.

### **Cost Savings**

Are you driven by saving money? Perhaps a lens of frugality drives your sustainability decisions, as it does for Robin Haight.

**Money matters.** We can get so caught up in what are the right things to do and what needs to be done to be sustainable. We can lose ourselves in whether we “believe” in climate change and what may be causing it. And we can fight about the political stances that Republicans and Democrats have on global warming. But, when all is said and done, sustainability comes down to what is important to us: Does sustainability align with our values? Robin Haight taught me that.

Robin is a fifty-year-old middle school teacher. She’s an eastern Oregonian through and through, having been born and raised in the state and, now married with three girls, living in eastern Oregon for the last quarter of a century.

People are important to her. It flows from her work with the church. Robin is both deeply religious—she was raised Christian and has a strong belief in God—and a science teacher, educating students about “little bits” of all sciences, including physical, earth, and life.

Robin is a registered Republican and votes conservative. She doesn't like politics and prefers to relate to people at the individual level. She admits to knowing about the impacts from climate change that exist today, such as sea level rise, ocean acidification, and the melting Arctic. She also feels climate change impacts that are directly affecting her local community, such as changing weather cycles, more extreme hot and cold spells, and delayed seasons. Still, she's skeptical about whether climate change is human-induced.

With their family of five headed by two public school teachers, saving money is top of mind. As Robin makes clear, many of the sustainability measures she and her husband pursue come from the perspective of wanting to drive their household costs as low as possible. And boy, are they successful at it.

In the summer months from March to October, Robin dries the family clothes and other textiles (bedsheets and rugs) on a fixed clothesline in their yard. She says it helps save them money on energy costs and supports keeping the house cool. Her house is primarily heated by a wood stove located in the basement. The house requires between two and three cords of wood per winter at a cost of \$250 to \$300 per cord. She and her husband make chopping wood a family outing. They buy a wood salvage permit to collect and chop wood for the winter. And the family grows a garden each year. They eat fresh all summer, preserving the bounty for the winter months and selling the rest at their local farmers market, netting the family about \$30 each week, which partly offsets a weekly grocery bill that averages \$125. As Robin says, "It's a hobby of my husband's [the garden], but it's super practical as well." The garden grows food and feeds her kids as well as provides a source of revenue.

For Robin, sustainability builds personal resilience. It's a mindset. She knows climate change will create problems in the future. She feels confident she and her family have developed a work-around and the ability to solution-set for the period of time that is needed to get through a disruption. She and her husband have

prepped so that they could survive a couple of weeks or longer with stored food, water, and a heat source, if needed, in a natural disaster from climate change.

For Robin, being frugal is being smart. Saving money over the long run is a priority.

Cost Savings is her value driver. She is a Penny-Wiser.

Sustainability decisions that align with her value driver include these measures:

- Air seal the home.
- Insulate the attic.
- Install high-efficiency (HE) appliances.
- Use drip irrigation on the lawn.

## Healthy Lifestyle

Are you motivated to live a healthier, fitter, more active life? An approach that marries a healthy, active lifestyle with sustainable actions might be your lens, as it is for Danny Metcalf.

**One with nature.** Danny is a high-energy, thirty-year-old former competitive triathlete who loves the outdoors and all things active that allow him to commune with nature. Danny works for a political consultancy in Washington, DC, helping to bring analytical rigor to political awareness campaigns. Prior to his political work, he worked for a global kombucha beverage company, one that was particularly dedicated to sustainable practices and giving back to environmental organizations to support forest and water conservation.

Danny is on a quiet mission to contribute meaningfully to climate change mitigation. He commutes to work via his electric bike (ebike). The twelve-mile round-trip journey is a pleasure for him. He thoroughly enjoys the fresh air and being alone with his thoughts at the beginning and end of each day.

Danny bikes because it keeps him active. Biking is made easy because his ebike is battery-propelled to help him along his journey over hills and across longer distances. His ebike makes daily

commuting via bike a reality and allows him to remain physically active while working a full-time professional job. More so, Danny's satisfaction comes from knowing that the largest personal carbon emissions category—combustion-engine emissions—doesn't apply to his life.

For Danny, staying active and fit, communing with nature, and creating as little impact on the planet as possible are his personal priorities.

Healthy Living is his value driver. He is a Be-Bester.

Sustainability decisions that align with his value driver include these measures:

- Bike to work.
- Purchase only sustainably made products.
- Be a vegetarian.
- Avoid genetically modified (GMO) foods.
- Install photovoltaic (PV) solar panels on the home.

### **Building Community**

Are you dedicated to supporting your community? Are you steadfast in making its economy vibrant by spending your dollars locally and with people and businesses you trust? If so, your sustainability lens may involve trusting in your community and building fellowship among like-minded peers, as it does for Marion Silas.

**Love local.** Marion Silas is a bright, curious twenty-seven-year-old who works in the mortgage industry and lives in northern Virginia. She recently purchased her first home and is passionate about fixing up the place and making it distinctly her own.

Marion is a rabid consumer of local food and personal care products. Her path to becoming a passionate advocate of the local community and economy began with a food transition in her teens.

Starting in high school and continuing into college, Marion gave up meat to become a vegetarian. That experience lasted seven years. Her catalyst was her disdain for the factory (a.k.a. industrial) farming of animals. She hated how inhumanely the animals were treated and the methods used to keep the animals healthy (enough)



before they were slaughtered: the extensive use of steroids to “beef up” the cows as quickly as possible and the rampant use of antibiotics to stave off illness in the animals from their caged, fecal-wading, food-engorged days.

When she began to introduce meat into her diet again, she made a conscious decision to only buy and eat animal meat from local farms that employed sustainable practices for raising animals and treated them humanely, providing them with respect and a good life. Marion says she only wants to put “clean” meat in her body.

She researched ethical meat producers in Virginia. She would travel to the various farms to meet the local farmers and to see the conditions in which the animals lived. From her research and visits, Marion began buying meat that was pasture-raised and hormone- and antibiotic-free. It was from this primary research that she built a community of farms in Virginia that she trusts. Her research grew to sourcing products beyond meat to fruits and vegetables, local body products, and personal accessories. She gains great satisfaction from knowing her food choices provide positive health benefits.

Marion feels personally enriched by knowing the people who raise the animals and grow the food she eats. These community relationships are meaningful to her. She talks about the friendships as a forged “fellowship” with people who share her values. She places great value on supporting her local community. “I feel good knowing that what the farmers say in how they farm and raise livestock is accurate and true. I know the people. I trust them and their word.”

For Marion, buying local and building community is important. Building trusted, mutually rewarding relationships with farmers and product purveyors brings her joy.

Building Community is her value driver. She is a Bridge Builder.

Sustainability decisions that align with her value driver include these measures:

- Buy local.
- Shop at farmers markets.
- Eat only seasonally grown food.

- Grow a garden and share excess vegetables and fruits with neighbors.
- Share lawn tools with neighbors.

### **Supporting Biodiversity**

Are you concerned about biodiversity loss? Do you seek to support the health and productivity of your local environment? Maybe the promotion of biodiversity and care for Earth's natural resources could drive your sustainability decisions, as they do for Sam Crane.

**Healthy land.** Sam Crane is a retired public school science teacher and, during the summer months, park ranger. He lives in Granby, Colorado, located some ninety miles from Denver and just twenty miles from the western entrance to Rocky Mountain National Park. Sam knows about the environment. He grew up on a farm in Upstate New York loving to hunt, fish, hike, and ski. He holds a degree in zoology and two minors in botany and chemistry. He's worked fifty-five seasons in the national park system, mainly stationed in the Western states.

Sam is a lover of the outdoors, and he sought to instill that same love in his students. "I tried to impress upon students the importance of nature and the environment." Sustainability to Sam is a universal truth. "Don't do anything that will negatively affect the ability of future generations to utilize the resources we enjoy today."

For Sam, living sustainably means treading lightly on this earth. He recycles everything he can. He walks and bikes as much as possible. He bought his 1,300-square-foot home in order to be close to the school where he taught, so commuting by car would not be necessary. He has a lawn but has kept it turf-free. He does not actively water his property but optimizes its natural features to ensure the trees and plants that do exist thrive.

Sam refers to his lawn as "unkempt and weed-infested"; land not "scaped." He likes it that way because, as he says, "the dandelions support the local honeybees." The trees he has planted, which are all native to the region, were installed to create a natural

privacy fence for his house. Because he avoids irrigation, he dug a trench filled with mulch around his tree planting, which serves as a bioswale for effectively feeding the trees with nutrients and naturally capturing rainwater.

Sam thinks in systems: environmental, sustainable, political. He knows a big part of his job with students was to arm them with knowledge in order to activate personal action. He leaves me with this: “We need to get our political system aligned with sustainable systems. Be both an informed and active citizen.”

For Sam, a healthy environment is the only option we should consider. His priority is to effect high-functioning “ecosystem” services.

Supporting Biodiversity is his value driver. He is a Nature Lover.

Sustainability decisions that align with his value driver include these measures:

- Convert hardscape surfaces (cement, asphalt) to permeable pavement.
- Walk and bike to work.
- Plant native trees and bushes.
- Use no synthetic chemicals.

If you can tell me which of the four categories are personal priorities for you, I can tell you which sustainability measures you should pursue. In some sense, it’s that simple. You have identified what is important to you as an individual or family. You have told me that you prioritize and execute on these values in your everyday life. Now, you can match sustainability measures to your value drivers and start taking action. As Emeril Lagasse says, “Bam!” It’s that easy.

Why is it important to identify our personal value drivers before we start implementing sustainability measures? Because it’s about commitment to action. Living our values helps us commit to a life in which we are flourishing.

We do the things that are important to us. We complete what we prioritize on our to-do lists. We do those things that reinforce who we believe we are.

## Building a List of Sustainability Measures

OK, so you've determined your value drivers. From there, we can build a list of sustainability measures to pursue.

In the legend below, determine which trait (or traits) resonates most with your personal priorities. I've created fun sustainability monikers you can try on and wear.

<b>Value Driver</b>	<b>Core Value Trait</b>	<b>Sustainability Moniker</b>
Cost Savings	Frugality	The Penny-Wiser
Healthy Living	Fitness and outdoor activity	The Be-Bester
Building Community	Trust, fellowship, and symbiosis	The Bridge Builder
Supporting Biodiversity	Concern for a clean environment (air, land/soil, and water)	The Nature Lover

Let's say you've determined that saving money is your primary motivator for implementing sustainability in your life. Great! Below is a starter list of sustainability actions you—the Penny-Wiser—can choose from right now.

- Purchase an electric bike (ebike).
- Install high-efficiency (HE) appliances (such as dishwasher and clothing washer and dryer) to lower your water and energy costs.
- Install a drip irrigation system for your lawn and deck plants.
- Lease an electric vehicle (EV) and save money on fuel and car maintenance.

Why these measures? Well, because each of these sustainability tips has a definite cost savings associated with it that grows more substantial over time.

- Ebikes are affordable transportation systems that cost between \$2,000 and \$4,000 to buy.
- HE washers and dryers save \$40 in energy and water costs each year.
- Drip irrigation systems can cut water bills in half.
- EVs cost around \$10 per month to charge and require no fuel and little maintenance.

What if the key value driver you identify is supporting biodiversity and a healthy environment? A similar set of sustainability measures can be compiled for you—the Nature Lover—to pursue.

- Compost all food waste to avoid landfill buildup.
- Use only natural pesticides and fertilizers for lawn and house plant upkeep.
- Purchase clothing made from natural fibers only.
- Grow a garden with native plants that support pollinators.

Again, why these suggested measures? They reinforce cleaner air and land, support more productive soil, and reduce waste and reliance on fossil fuels.

The same kind of correlation can be made between the Healthy Living value driver and sustainability measures that support better personal health, and between the Building Community value driver and measures that feed, promote, and reinforce the people and businesses of a local economy.

Take a look at the starter list of sustainability measures to follow, grouped by the four value drivers we've identified in this chapter. (This is by no means an exhaustive list.)

---

**Sustainability Measures by Value Driver**


---

**Penny-Wisers  
(Cost Savings)**

- Replace a gas range with electric.
- Grow your own garden.
- Plant drought-resistant plants in your yard.

**Be-Besters  
(Healthy Living)**

- Eat non-animal alternative proteins.
- Walk or bike to work.
- Buy sustainably made clothing.

**Bridge Builders  
(Building Community)**

- Invest in community solar.
- Become a CSA (community-supported agriculture) member of a local produce farm.
- Install a rain cistern to capture stormwater runoff.

**Nature Lovers  
(Supporting Biodiversity)**

- Plant only native trees and bushes.
  - Avoid using any synthetic chemicals inside and outside of your home.
  - Use only natural fertilizers and pesticides in your garden.
- 

I've promised you a simple three-step system for building sustainability into your life. We have checked off one of those steps: determining your value driver. The second step toward building your sustainability muscle is to learn how to categorize measures. I like to talk about them as "impact categories." Once you know what those impact categories are, you can pick and choose measures from each that you want to pursue. We will learn more about impact categories in Part II.

The last of the three steps to personal sustainability is to separate and demarcate measures into buckets of sustainability actions to be pursued. The S-M-L sustainability framework categorizes actions into small (easy to do), medium (require more effort), and large (involve financial and technological commitments). This is a scalable framework to bring order and understanding to sustainability

measures that are important to you—that reinforce your personal values—and fall into your purview of capabilities. These measures are doable, they reveal a willingness for changing behaviors and processes to create new habits, and they use resources (time and financial) in a careful and repeatable manner.

The S-M-L sustainability framework is valuable in two distinct ways:

- It allows you to quickly scan and identify measures that are affordable and can be easily completed, providing you with quick wins to spur you along.
- It fosters a growth mindset by developing a roadmap—created by you, for you—that grows and deepens your commitment to sustainability measures that are more positively impactful both to the earth and to others beyond yourself and your family.

With the S-M-L sustainability framework, you determine where you are going to begin your journey and where you'd like to progress. It's the same as writing your personal and professional goals at the beginning of each new year: What do you want to achieve this year, in three years, and in ten? For each tranche of goals, we progress toward the initial targets we set for ourselves, which help us get closer to our ultimate end goals. We don't become marathon runners by entering into a local 10K run when we haven't run around the block. Running a marathon takes a ton of little goals to be set and met, which then allow us to run twenty-six-plus miles without injury or flame-out. During many months, we develop our stamina, endurance, and mental fortitude.

We want to ultimately achieve big sustainability goals, but we need smaller, more manageable goals to keep us excited to learn and do more. It's motivating to experience quick wins: sustainability tips we've employed in our life and mastered.

Before we build a customized sustainability plan, we have a few more learning stops. In the next chapter, I'll discuss what kinds of changes you must embrace to be sustainable.