

Interview Assignment

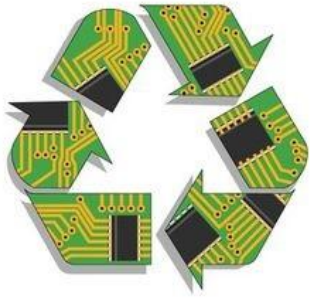
University of
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ENBUS 203: Green Entrepreneurship

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Cori Crawford, Dylan Gardner, Louri Basmanov, Khaleel Arfeen, Mirna Halilovic, Rajdeep Malhi



Eco-Tech



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INTRODUCTION

Determination, self-motivation, innovation, sustainable, and passionate towards the environment are just a few of the characteristics that make up a successful green entrepreneur. Jose Palacios, the owner and founder of Eco-Tech Waterloo Inc. located in Waterloo Ontario is the perfect representative of these attributes of the ecopreneur.

SELECTION PROCESS

To select an appropriate candidate for our green entrepreneur, our group firstly brainstormed what it takes to be one. To do this we collectively discussed traits in which we thought made a green business. This included a business in the renewable energy sector, waste management or having a product that is sustainable compared to the competition. In order to fulfill being an entrepreneur, we looked for someone who started a business, who had a revolutionary product or service and who was preferably local. We searched for the ecopreneurs through several online databases. This resulted in several responses including Tony Perrotta from Greentec and Jose Palacios from Eco-Tech Waterloo Inc. We chose Jose because we felt he embodied what it meant to be a green entrepreneur greater than Greentec, based on Eco-tech being a smaller firm and less profit driven. Jose was very optimistic about this opportunity and this definitely was a factor in our choice. We scheduled our interview on November 3rd at 4 pm. A full summary of the selection process can be found under Khaleel's personal reflection.

Prior to the interview we individually came up with a list of relevant interview questions. We utilized his website: <http://www.eco-techrecycling.com> and various general questions to ask an entrepreneur found online to formulate general questions to ask Jose. We then reviewed all the questions and came up with new ones as a group to be targeted specifically towards Eco-Tech, based on any information we could find including information found on Industry Canada's website. We then as a group devised several key categories of questions we would like to ask, including personal, pre-business, business and advice. We then began to fit our questions into their respective categories while being selective of the meaningful questions and eliminating repetitions. We kept in mind that we wanted an exhaustive interview but there were time restraints. We finalized our list our questions using only what we felt would be the most encompassing. A full list of the interview questions and an in depth explanation of our thought processes regarding the questions can be found at the end of this document and under Louri's self reflection respectively.

ECOREPRENEUR

DEFINING ENTREPRENEUR

To be a successful entrepreneur you must be determined to make your business idea come to life. Along with being determined, the typical entrepreneur must be able to inspire themselves through their dreams. This was evident during our interview with Jose, because he discussed the

fact that his company exists in an industry that is not very well known. Therefore there is not really a model to follow in terms of building his business. He had to rely on his own thoughts and ideas, and learn from his own mistakes that he may have encountered in order to achieve his goals.

As a newly formed business, Jose was short on financial resources on startup. However, through his dedication in establishing his business and making it known to the general public he is beginning to see an increase in profits and acknowledgement in the community. Jose is a doer when it comes to creating awareness for his business, working with the community to establish a reputation and showcase his devotion to his work. Mr. Palacios knows the details about his business, to what can and can't be recycled and the technical information within. Mr. Palacios demonstrates his ability to innovate by finding ways to expand the variety of materials he accepts to process from the community. He has increased his capacity to allow for basically all electronics including household appliances.

DEFINING GREEN ENTREPRENEUR

We believe Jose Palacios is a green entrepreneur for various reasons. He is genuinely committed to what he does and bettering the environment. He is an active member of the community, working with local schools and businesses to become more sustainable and informing them of the benefits of doing so. He simply doesn't take everything he collects to be processed, but works through each item to deem if it is able to be remanufactured. He has visions of one day donating the functioning electronics to developing nations, trying to better the world. Most of all, Jose has a dream that if we all work together we can collectively make the world a better place by living in harmony with the environment.

INFORMATION SEEKING

HIS BACKGROUND

Jose Palacios' dream as a green entrepreneur has been the result of a lifetime of personal development. Although Jose Palacios strives for continued success as a green entrepreneur today, his initial dream was much different. Jose was born and raised in the poor trash-ridden Mexican city, moving to Canada in his teenage years. The contrast between the polluted streets of Chiapas and the comparatively clean ones of Waterloo appalled Jose, forever rendering him conscious of the environment as he wished that his new home would never have the same consequence from careless polluting. Describing himself as a very shy and timid young man, he first thought he lacked the courage to be active in the extremely competitive business environment. When poor biology marks in high school killed his dream to be a personal trainer he turned to what he was most interested in- information technology. After working as an IT consultant for many years, he gained courage as well as knowledge of the business world. However, after a decade of this he became restless and ready to prove his worth to the world. Lightning struck when he heard of the OES program. The idea for Mr. Palacios' enterprise spawned from his care for the environment teamed with his knowledge and interest in technology from his history in IT. His life savings provided as the start up funds necessary for implementing Eco-Tech Waterloo Inc.

Vince Lombardi once stated that, "The difference between a successful person and others is not a lack of strength, not a lack of knowledge, but rather a lack of will." Jose Palacios has definitely shown a lot of willpower in the prosperity of his business and the industry.

THE COMPANY

Eco-Tech Waterloo Inc. Eco-Tech is committed to providing convenient E-waste, data shredding destruction service to the Waterloo Region through WEEE and non-WEEE recycling programs and selling quality refurbished computers to home and business clients. Jose stated *"People buy TV's and don't think about what they're going to do after they're done with it. I provide the other part that takes care of electronics once they're done with it."* His company also offers site pick-up, data shredding destruction, and IT assessment management and computer repair services. Eco-tech works with the Ontario Electronic Stewardship Program (OES) and any defective products which cannot be refurbished are then shipped to an OES Certified Processor to be broken down into their most basic components for Recycling. OES pays \$200 per tonne under the Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment (WEEE) directive. Eco-Tech Waterloo Inc. is fortunate enough and opportune enough to be on the forefront of this type of recycling that minimizes the impact on the natural environment. Eco-tech offers a very exclusive service to their customers. Eco-Tech Waterloo Inc. is actively working in the community and local businesses to educate them, of the importance of recycling electronics responsibly.

BUSINESS ANALYSIS

Eco-Tech is the only E-waste, battery recycling, computer sales firm in the Kitchener-Waterloo region as of 2010. However, being a smart entrepreneur Jose is aware that a new business can easily come in and take a chunk of his market share. As a result he is in constant use of the SWOT analysis. As discussed in our interview, Mr. Palacios' current strengths are that he is currently the only firm in KW that performs the services he does. He not only collects [WEEE-E-waste](#) at no cost, but also refurbishes purchased off-lease [Core2Duo](#) or newer computers to be sold locally or donated abroad. His company provides TV, computer, monitor, battery recycling, E-waste, data shredding destruction, pick-up service, deals on quality, custom refurbished computers, and PC repairs for Waterloo, Kitchener, Cambridge, and surrounding.. Eco-Tech works with the Ontario Electronic Stewardship Program ([OES](#)). He sees the limitations and inefficiencies of this program to be the main weaknesses of his business. Another main weakness of his business is lack of capacity and awareness. Jose has received a substantial amount of parties interested in his services from all over the country, although Jose cannot accept it all due to lack of capacity. Also, being a relatively new business Jose is short on financial assets and therefore is only marketing his business in the traditional forms of internet, flyers and word of mouth. The lack of awareness of his business is a definite weakness according to Jose himself. While he recognizes his weaknesses he also acknowledges that these weaknesses are very capable of becoming opportunities. Jose is working with the government and trying to redefine the inefficiencies of the OES program, and he is being met with success. He currently worked out a way to include new types of electronics in the program, such as some home appliances. In respect to the lack of awareness, Jose once he gets the appropriate means, he will introduce some wider forms of advertising, including radio ads and ads in the local newspaper. He is also working with high schools to do presentations on the benefits of proper recycling and establishing electronic recycling programs with these schools. The threat Eco-tech faces

currently is new businesses opening up in the same field. He combats this in offering an array of services listed above.

OES, a government run agency is the biggest incentive that Jose has to stay in business. Over time, Jose expects more [WEEE-E-waste](#) diverted from the landfill and back into the industrial processes. The social trend has been moving towards environmental stewardship and the feedback for green businesses has been positive. Again, Jose's position as a green entrepreneur is reinforced by new social conventions and a new generation of consumers. Although in the past, it would be hard for environmentally conscious people like Jose to begin enterprises such as the one he currently has. There are big incentives and opportunities now for like-minded people. As our will for the preservation and protection of the environment augments, so does our capability to fix environmental problems. Jose Palacios has capitalized on being a trailblazer in the electronics recycling industry and finds new ways to use technology to his advantage.

CONCLUSIONS

In the end, Jose Palacios from Eco-Tech not only met our expectations but exceeded them. His responses exemplified what it meant to be a green entrepreneur and he provided us with great hindsight and advice in our studies of and entering into the green field. In our opinion Jose was the perfect choice for this project.

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

DYLAN GARDNER: HOW AM I AN ENTREPRENEUR

When the term Entrepreneur comes to mind the words, determination, creativity and thrill seeking come to mind. The entrepreneur representative, Jose Palacios from Eco-Tech Waterloo Inc. holds all the characteristics of the average entrepreneur but with a major push towards green. There are many similarities and differences between the entrepreneur and myself. To become a successful entrepreneur you must have the ability to dream. Along with dreaming, there are 9 other "D's of an entrepreneur" that consists of devotion, determination, dedication and so on. I see myself as a very dedicated person. When I want to achieve something or if I believe something should be done in a specific way I do not rest until I finish what I want. One thing that stood out to me during the interview was the sacrifice Jose made with his family and wife in order to make his business work. To start a business it takes many devoted hours and he admitted the time he committed has taken a toll on his relationship with his family. I am a very family oriented person and I probably couldn't make a similar decision.

When interviewing Jose it was clear that in order to start your own business you must be very determined and innovative towards the specific area. Since being a kid instead of playing with the remote control car, Jose was more interested in opening the car up and seeing how it works. Starting a green business is a new strand of business in today's economy and in order to be successful the entrepreneur has to be innovative. I can personally relate to this because I prefer to stand up and be a leader as opposed to being follower. I like to branch off certain tasks and see different perspectives and be able learn from my decisions. Jose's Goals are to expand his business and become a top leader in the world but before he moves on he wants to perfect his work within the local community. Goal setting plays an important role if you want to become a successful entrepreneur. I am a strong believer of goal setting whether it's setting personal goals

or school related goals. If you want to achieve something in the future you need to be able to foresee yourself in the situation and plan steps on how you are going to get there. To be a successful business owner one of the most important skills you must obtain is excellent communication within your company and with the stakeholders. Developing a strong sense of communication with customers is critical when building a trustful reputation. I would call myself a people person. Although I have only held two jobs in my short working life, I have developed great person to person skills. Working in the food service industry it is important to develop relationships with your customers if you want to be successful. You cannot run a successful business or be successful at your job if you are turning people away because of poor communication or that you communicate in a way that is not acceptable.

One area that I can relate greatly to our entrepreneur is having a green mind set. I have chosen a green path for myself by enrolling in Environment and Business. Ever since I was a kid I have had a love for the environment and growing up my concern and knowledge on how important the earth is has increased. Eco-Tech Waterloo Inc. is a company that fully demonstrates how to be green from top to bottom. Jose incorporates green in every part of his everyday business. Marketing himself as a green business, he wants to put trust with his customers that when he say's green he really means it. Growing up in a third world country Jose noted that we have no idea how much we take for granted here in Canada. I personally remember travelling through a city in Mexico on vacation and remembering seeing giant piles of trash just lying in the streets. When seeing this I thought to myself that this isn't right and that there is surely something that can be done. Jose wants his business to be a leader in the green field and wants to show other companies that it is possible to be sustainable. I think this is great for a small business to have a big goal because it takes one idea to get a whole new area started. Most people that are not familiar with green business may ask the question why bother? Out of the entire interview the answer to this question was what stood out the most to me. Jose said that it is our duty as humans to protect the environment as we are the ones who will suffer the consequences in the future. He markets himself as a green company and stands 100% by his name unlike other companies that just uses green washing as a marketing scheme.

IOURI BASMANOV: DESIGNING AND EXECUTING INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

When our group first confirmed our interview with the entrepreneur, we set out on brainstorming some appropriate and unique questions that would apply to our interviewee. Our interviewee, in this case, was Jose Palacios. Jose Palacios is the proprietor of Eco-Tech Waterloo Inc. in Waterloo. I decided to separate questions into personal, pre-business, business and advice categories that would allow us to have a well-rounded, but in no means exhaustive, interview. We decided that questions made up on the spot in the heat of discussion would be just as valuable.

We began with concocting some personal questions that would allow us to peer deeper into the heart of the entrepreneur and the development that brought him to where this point in his life. These questions are important to determine what kind of person Jose is and how those personal characteristics apply to his entrepreneurial endeavors. Questions like "Was there anything relating to your childhood that made you choose this field?" were asked of Jose. He informed us that he grew in to his current entrepreneurial position through the trial and error of personal ambitions, so we were successful in that sense.

In the pre-business section of our interview questions, we tried to make questions that would address the steps Jose took before taking on a green business. Our questions included elements such as start-up financing, mentoring and green strategy. One question that was asked of Jose was “What does green mean to you? And how important is it today to implement green into your business and why?” To which he answered that he was always environmentally conscious and saw that the old way of humans interacting with the environment was not the right way. He also added that as people become more environmentally aware, he is able to tap into that growing customer base to develop his business. I thought that this was a good response because it inspired me to think of a green business idea because of the fact that the world is becoming more aware and adopting of the environmental practices that are out there and developing as I write this. The pre-business questions were asked to supplement any personal questions and mark the development of Jose to the stage of before actually taking on the environmental entrepreneurial challenge.

The business questions that my group and I thought of were specific to the operational and strategic elements of Jose’s business. We asked about elements such as marketing, relationship with customers, strengths and weaknesses with the company and employees. I made up some specific questions that referred to the information that was provided on Eco-Tech Waterloo Inc.’s website and related it to the progress to the legal and technical boundaries that Jose is obliged to follow to run his business. Some of our questions were specific in that they linked two or more elements and would result in a more detailed answer. An example of such a question was “Do you value creativeness and innovation in your company, and how do you reward it?” This question encouraged the entrepreneur to explain to us how creativeness is allowed to thrive within his company and how he rewards it, if he does. Fortunately, Jose rewards creativity by implementing new ideas and methods into the business.

Finally, we decided to close up the interview by asking about advice that could apply to emerging green entrepreneurs today. This was to me the most important question as it shed light on important personal questions like “Do I have what it takes to become an entrepreneur?” The answer to this question was again supported by the fact that Jose was molded into an entrepreneur, and not born into one. Overall, I believe the format of our interview and the questions constructed were used effectively to learn as much as possible about the entrepreneur and his business.

MIRNA HALILOVIC: THE ENTHUSIASM OF THE ENTREPRENEUR

Although there were many aspects of my groups’ interview with Jose Palacios, the owner of Eco-Tech Waterloo Inc., that I found fascinating, the enthusiasm of the entrepreneur is what had the greatest affect on me throughout this interview process. The first thing that struck me about Jose was his passion for what he does. He told us that there are many people in his line of work that, instead of disposing of the waste consciously, will sell it off to other counties to use for money and that in itself creates a larger environmental impact. Jose believes that a monetary gain for him to do something like that is just not worth the price the environment pays. He says “I stand by my name” and he truly means it. He only deals with OES approved companies so that he can “responsibly process materials. This leads me to my next point, that unlike many people who begin their own business because they are money hungry, Jose proves that that is not a

good reason to go into a business, especially a business like this. He says that he has felt a pinch in his savings, but that it is “a small sacrifice now for a better future tomorrow”. To be that giving to put his own money on the line to help this business succeed shows that he does truly care and stand by what this company is. He says that one of the most rewarding parts of what he does is “providing a service that puts a smile on people’s faces”. During our interview he compares business to the game of Risk going on to say that being a business owner is like being your own tank, and it gives you “a better opportunity to break through and conquer new parts of the business”. This gives a real sense that he wants to take his work further in the future and is excited about the possible future endeavors he could encounter. In Nicaragua, Jose’s native home, there are piles of garbage on the side of every road, mainly due to the fact that they do not have a proper disposal method in place. He wants to make sure that if there is already a government run system here, that people are aware of it, and that it is used, so that we do not have a slow build up of garbage by our roads. His dream is to be able to repair enough computers to send to areas, such as Mexico, that can use them. In my opinion, Jose Palacios makes me eager to see the future of his company, and green business in general, because his enthusiasm and sheer interest in his work gives me great faith that things will only get better from here, and that is something that I cannot wait to be a part of.

KHALEEL ARFEEN: HOW WE CHOSE JOSE PALACIOS OF ECO-TECH WATERLOO INC.

Beginning this assignment we each had our own reservations that we would find a suitable candidate for this project who was ideally local. We had all brainstormed prior to searching that we were to look for someone who met the basic requirements of being an entrepreneur and being green in respect to their business, but also someone who was genuine, passionate and a visionary when it came to their business.

Our search began by utilizing the directory of ‘greenenterprise.net’. Using this website we obtained a list of relevant green entrepreneurs and emailed them accordingly. One issue we did have with this website was that many of the businesses listed were not local to Waterloo, and in turn caused us to look for a local website. We came across ‘kwkids.com’, a local website with a directory to many green businesses in the Waterloo region. We selected those which we felt met our requirements and emailed them stating our situation and an opportunity for an interview. Our next step was to wait for responses.

To our surprise, many of the businesses we contacted responded very optimistically about the interview, taking it as an opportunity to publicize their company. In turn we were left with approximately four candidates. However, upon a short call to each company, two failed to meet the basic requirements we searched for; one business was a sister company of a larger corporation and the other was not as entirely green as he stated. This left us with two promising choices: The well established and larger company of Greentec or a seedling business and far smaller one of Eco-tech.

Both businesses were in similar industries of E-waste collection and recycling. Greentec being ISO14001 certified, rapidly growing and innovative within the green industry would be an excellent choice. However, during our short phone call we felt that Greentec was focused more towards profits rather than the environment and did not meet the requirements we sought. While this may have been arbitrary, it influenced us to choose Eco-Tech Waterloo Inc. which

would potentially provide us with a more representing and sincere embodiment of a green entrepreneur, all while hopefully providing a small form of promotion crucial to seedling businesses.

In the end, Jose gave us a clear message on what it is to be a green entrepreneur. He gave us advice towards our studies and on becoming a green entrepreneur as well. As a group we are completely satisfied with our selection of Jose and feel he embodies the role of a green entrepreneur.

CORI CRAWFORD: HOW THE INTERVIEW DEVIATED FROM EXPECTATIONS

Subsequent to the interview with the entrepreneur I realized that I had entered the interview with certain expectations and assumptions of characteristics of entrepreneurs. Prior to speaking with Mr. Palacios, I was pleased to see that I was incorrect on many of these postulations.

From the moment the interview began I was surprised at how down to earth and approachable the entrepreneur was. Although he is managing a successful enterprise he never emitted even the slightest air of arrogance, a characteristic that I wrongfully assumed all managers possess. My previous experience in a business environment has shown that most people in a superiority position generally come across as slightly condescending, but Mr. Palacios spoke to us as equals and in a language that we could easily understand which I found to be a breath of fresh air.

Another shocking aspect of the interview was how relatively inexperienced the entrepreneur was. I wrongly assumed that most successful business people have an extensive background in business and most often a degree of some sort. When Mr. Palacios revealed he had “little to no business experience other than working as an IT guy” and that simply his willingness to learn brought him success, I felt inspired and as though my personal success was so much more tangible. I found it both shocking and relieving when he would emphasize how important soft skills are rather than just pure book smarts.

In terms of the business itself I was surprised at how much illegal shipping goes on from Canada to third world countries. He informed us that he is the only government registered electronics collector in the area and that there are very few in all of Canada. This means that a vast majority of collection agencies are wrongfully claiming to be environmentally conscious, when in reality they are shipping materials to third world countries at a huge profit and even larger detriment to the environment.

The part of the interview that I found to deviate the most from my expectations of entrepreneurs was when he stated that although at times money situations are tight, he sometimes turns down business. He does this because he wants to perfect his operations before they grow. Mr. Palacios claimed “he would rather have two very happy customers than forty-six who had a mediocre experience” because “it is a small price to pay today for a brighter tomorrow.” Being born and raised in a money hungry society I found this to be rather unheard of and inspiring simultaneously.

RAJDEEP MALHI: HOW THE INTERVIEW IMPACTED ME

Going into the interview, I was expecting to meet a person that dreamt of running their own business and had a vision of running an environmentally friendly business. However, this interview made me realize that once you graduate from university, your career path or job is not all graven in step and stone, meaning that your options will always be endless. Growing up you start to distinguish your likes from dislikes. Interestingly, even after you graduate university you may realize your field of work may not have the money or it might not be something you want to do. According to Mr. Palacios, you can always reconsider your career path and that it's never too late. This is mainly because opportunities come up along the way and Mr. Palacios has inspired me to take advantage of any opportunity that may be given to you. Although, you may not know how to proceed from what is given to you, there will always be friends to assist you along the way. From this interview, I realized that you don't need to be an expert to be in a certain field, but you have to be willing to learn and take risks. In order to do so, you have to have the motivation to take on the challenge. To dream of doing something might be easy, but it's never easy to achieve what you ultimately want. Furthermore, it takes a lot of hard work to get to where you want to be and sometimes you need to sacrifice things you may love to do because in order to achieve success. Mr. Palacios stated that "small sacrifices now, [is] for a better future tomorrow." That being said, you can't always be business driven, and you also have to look at other important things in life, such as your family. Many times what happens is that, businessmen/women start to focus solely on the business and forget about everything else and by the time they realize it, the family has already drifted apart. This interview would make me reprioritize what's important to me if I ever decide to run a business. The last thing I would want is for my family to fall apart because I put the business before the family. Lastly, this interview made me grasp the reasons of running a business of my own and makes me want to pursue a career which may involve running my own business. The number one reason is being able to be your own boss and at the same time, doing the things you enjoy the most. From this interview I have also been able to apply my own knowledge of business to an entrepreneur's business module, such as:

- Being green is important because it makes yourself look good in the public's eye
- You have to be a people's person and listen to what others have to say
- The world isn't all that perfect and that there are people out there that can get you in trouble if you're not careful.
- The government might be hard to get around, but does help business owners be successful
- You have to have a good reputation in the community before you go big and expand
- You need to understand your market and not get yourself into something that has no potential

Last but not least, this interview made me appreciate everything I have and the things I am and will be able to do. Once you have established a good foundation of a business, being generous and helping the less fortunate is something I would want to do if I ever do end up running a business.

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Personal:

- What were your career plans when you graduated from high school
- Did you go to school in a related field to your business
- Was there anything relating to your child hood that made you choose this field?
- Was there any influence of your academics or work experience that steered you into this field
- Did you have dreams of starting a green business or did it just happen
- How and where did you get the idea for this business
- Do you believe entrepreneurs are born or made
- Do you believe anyone can start a business

Pre-business:

- How long have you been in business, and when/where did you start
- Did you have difficulties financing your business at the starting point
- Who taught you about the business, or did you learn as you went
- What does green mean to you? and how important is it today to implement green into your business and why

Business:

- How has your company grown in the past few years and what are the most crucial things you have done to grow your business
- What are some sacrifices you have made to be where you are at today
- What is the worst experience you've had as an entrepreneur
- What are the biggest challenges you face as a green business
- Do you feel there is any thing holding your business back, such as social values, competition etc.

- What has been the greatest satisfaction and motivation in owning a green business
- What are some strengths and weaknesses of you company
- What are some future opportunities and threats facing your business
- What are you doing to market your business
- Are you aware of the competition and how do you feel you are better
- Are you satisfied as to where your business has led you and where it is going
- There are 44 products that are eligible for diversion from the landfill under the Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment Program. Are you expecting this number to grow steadily over time?
- Have you stuck with your initial business plan or have you deviated
- How does your business give back to the community
- Who are your customers and are you aware of their needs
- What is your relationship with your customers?
- Have you thought about how to gain new customers

- What is the skills and requirements you look for in your employees
- Do you value creativeness and innovation in your company, and how do you reward it
- Do you feel your employees are happy working at this business and do you feel they are being challenged everyday
- Do you take employees advice and recommendations into consideration
- Do you feel your company has good management skills, and how so?
- Do your employees share the same vision as you do?

Advice:

- What advice would you give entrepreneurs starting out today? Specifically green entrepreneurs
- In your opinion, what skills does a person need to have to be a successful entrepreneur?