Alumni Action Learning / Coaching Breakfasts

The MIT Sloan Sustainability alumni breakfasts are part of a wider “Sustainability Unleashed” alumni engagement effort. This effort is led by alumni and supported by the Sustainability Initiative at MIT Sloan.

WHY ARE WE ENGAGING ALUMNI IN SUSTAINABILITY?
Right now there is huge untapped potential in our alumni network. Some alumni care about sustainability but feel too busy and isolated in their company or community to take action. Others are making huge strides in personal, professional, and community life, but their success is invisible to the community. Many of us are in touch with a few friends, but are not connected to the many potential coaches and mentors for our work, or the people we can help out. From time to time we could all use some inspiration, some guidance, and just a sounding board to think through how we can lead change toward a more sustainable world. Here’s what’s possible:

VISION OF SUSTAINABILITY UNLEASHED:
Alumni of MIT Sloan live lives they love and make meaningful contributions to a sustainable world: one with healthy organizations, healthy environments, healthy societies, and an economy that meets human needs.

MISSION OF SUSTAINABILITY UNLEASHED:
To create a vibrant and connected MIT Sustainability@Sloan alumni community, one that serves as a multiplier of our effectiveness and contribution to sustainability in our personal, professional, and community lives.

To create a world-class sustainability program at MIT Sloan for future cohorts of students through the contributions of alumni, including their insights, ideas, experience, and resources.

OBJECTIVES OF THE BREAKFASTS:
- **Build our community and network.** Get to know each other, find impromptu opportunities for collaboration in work and play.
- **Enhance our individual effectiveness through action learning.** Reflect and get clear on our individual goals as we lead change toward sustainability; get clear on the skill development and personal transformations needed to achieve those goals; commit to concrete steps forward; follow up with each other on progress and learning.
• **Develop our capacity to coach and grow other leaders.** Learn frameworks and approaches to coaching; practice coaching skills in the “laboratory” of the alumni breakfasts; develop a shared body of knowledge grounded in MIT Sloan expertise; translate the experience of coaching from the breakfasts to the real world of our leadership roles.

• **Build collective action.** Find opportunities to mobilize as a community toward shared sustainability goals in our communities, workplaces, and nations.

**APPROACH:**

• Monthly breakfasts, starting in Cambridge and then expanding to other locales.

• Alternating formats depending on mix of participants and to shake things up. Include some or all of the following elements:
  o Mingling and informal conversation.
  o Introductions and “check-in,” giving each person a chance to name the “live challenges” they are wrestling with as well as their basic coordinates.
  o Presentation of a tool or framework for reflection and coaching (e.g. from Peter Senge, Ed Schein, Otto Scharmer).
  o “Fishbowl” coaching where a coach and coachee sit in the center of a circle of participants. Allows some to practice reflection and coaching while others observe.
  o Coaching in groups of three with a coach, coachee, and observer.
  o “Check-out” where people share their learnings from the day, making it easy to capture and carry forward to future sessions.

**SAMPLE AGENDA:**

8:00 People arrive, get breakfast, mingle
8:10 Welcome, round of introductions
8:20 Invite volunteers to give a quick overview of an action learning challenge. Decide on format (fishbowl vs. small group)
8:30 Start round one of peer coaching
8:50 Pause, get observer reflections
9:00 Round two of peer coaching
9:15 Go around the room, share learning and reflections (one person capture)
9:25 Plan next meeting, adjourn

**SOME GUIDELINES FOR COACHING AND REFLECTION:**

• Focus on *inquiry* over *advocacy*: ask open-ended questions (see handout of coaching questions), draw out people’s own thinking and reflection. Hold back on advice and guidance until situation is clear in everyone’s mind. If needed, jot down ideas on paper so you don’t have to interrupt the flow of conversation.
Use *appreciative inquiry*: ask questions about the person’s commitments, the strengths and skills they bring to the situation, the possibilities they see, rather than dwelling on “what’s wrong” and problem solving.

Create space for everyone to participate. Often the quietest participants are the most observant, but they may not share without prompting and a deliberate effort to moderate the most verbal participants to make room.

**About the Sustainability Initiative at MIT Sloan**

The mission of the MIT Sloan Initiative for Sustainable Business and Society is to change management practice across sectors so that businesses can prosper in the face of 21st century systemic challenges, while helping to realize the values of social justice, care for future generations, and the flourishing of life. We do so by supporting world-class teaching, research, and engagement at MIT Sloan and beyond.

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