

Energy Champions - Are they effective?



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1. Introduction

As part of many energy awareness campaigns, it is useful to establish a network of volunteers to assist with the promotion of energy saving values and messages to colleagues. These Energy Champions can be very effective and a good resource. But they need to be carefully recruited, trained and equipped for their role. They also need ongoing support to stay effective and active.

This article explains how Energy Champions can help your campaign.

It covers the following topics:

- Why have Energy Champions?
- What do we call them?
- How many do we need?
- How do we recruit them?
- What is their role?
- What support do they need?
- Importance of Supportive Structures



Champions on a walkabout – University of Edinburgh

2. Why have Energy Champions?

In an energy awareness campaign a variety of communication messages can be used to target audiences. These are important and we are usually sent electronically or by hard copy. Usually this information is of a ‘wallpaper’ variety. It brands the campaign to make it memorable such as a catchy campaign title/logo. For example, a few years ago the BBC chose *Watts on?* and Iceland chose *Kill a Watt*.

However, people respond best to face-to-face interaction and the role of an Energy Champion can meet this need and opportunity at a local level. Also the Energy Champion can model the attitudes and behaviours you are seeking to influence. The Energy Champions can lead by example. They can become the ‘face’ of the campaign to their colleagues. The Energy Champion can respond to questions, objections and problems and act as the “eyes and ears” of the Campaign Team.

3. What do we call them?

The title “Energy Champions” - reflects the subject matter (energy) and what they are about (champions). The title needs to reflect their role in the campaign. If the campaign is limited to energy reduction, then “Energy” is fine. However, if the campaign also covers waste/recycling, travel, water and procurement then terms like “Green” or “Environmental” or “Sustainability” might be more

appropriate. For some organisations the term “Champion” might not fit the culture. Other options could include “Co-ordinator” or “Representative” or “Officer”. Consider what you call people who look after fire, first aid and health & safety.



Campaign Team North Bristol NHS Trust

4. How many do we need?

First, you need to decide **where** you want them. Often the Pareto Principle applies where 80% of the energy is used in 20% of the buildings. If this is the ratio then it is important to focus on the 20% - the largest using buildings. For an estate with 100 buildings having at least one Energy Champion in each of the 20 largest buildings will be a priority. It is useful to start with a core and gradually build up the numbers. As a rule of thumb it is helpful to have one Champion per £25K of energy expenditure. So for an annual £2m energy bill, a good number is 80 Champions.

5. How do we recruit them?

It is best to have staff volunteer for the role. Before volunteering they will need some indication of what is involved, how long it will take and might be anxious about whether they will get their manager's approval and support.

At the University of St Andrews there is a network of Environmental Facilitators. In addition to the time required for training, the post is advertised as 30 minutes per week. However, these Facilitators will be alert as they do their jobs and can give additional time of their own to evening walkabouts, when their areas are largely unoccupied.

Some staff will volunteer when a Manager asks for volunteers as the question implicitly suggests management support for the role. Another useful way of finding people quickly is to conduct an on-line environmental survey and to have a question at the end asking for staff to volunteer and send in their details. Induction training can be a good place to recruit new Champions.

6. What is their role?

It is useful to have a simple statement. At University of St Andrews it is:

“The purpose of the Environmental Facilitators is to engage colleagues and to encourage environmental behaviours in each school/unit to reduce the University's overall carbon footprint.”

The behaviours include:

- Reducing energy consumption through 'smart' workplace operations
- Reducing the amount of recyclables going to landfill
- Reducing the amount of overall waste by promoting re-use
- Reducing water waste
- Promoting/advising on sustainable work travel options
- Encouraging sustainable purchasing

For Champions to be effective they need:

- Attitude and enthusiasm for environmental issues
- Knowledge of the issues
- Time to do the role
- Have management support
- Be volunteers rather than conscripts



Laboratory walkabout by Champions – University of Edinburgh

7. What support do they need?

In addition to management support they need to know they have the support of the Campaign Team and their fellow Champions.

Scottish Borders Council have a campaign running called *Tread Lightly* and recently received a Carbon Trust award. The message they give to their Environmental Champions is:

“You will have your Senior Manager support to distribute surveys and conduct monitoring exercises and will act as their “eyes and ears” of the campaign in your local area, as well as acting as a conduit for campaign materials and initiatives”.

They go on to say:

“The campaign team will provide you with the support in your role as an Environmental Champion. If you have any queries, requests or comments, the team will be your first point of contact.”



Julie Rankine (right) receives Carbon Trust award for *Tread Lightly* campaign at Scottish Borders Council

Champions need training to equip them for their role. It has to be short, clear and practical. Often training focuses on what they can do to make environmental improvements. However, what is often neglected is how to help them to engage with and influence their colleagues. Understanding why colleagues behave environmentally and how to influence it in a winning way is vital. So the role is not just about technical solutions but people solutions.

The Champions need to model behaviours in a way that wins over colleagues rather than alienate them. This can be challenging and lonely and to keep functioning effective Champions need support from:

- Campaign Team
- Other Energy Champions
- Line Management
- Senior Management
- Colleagues

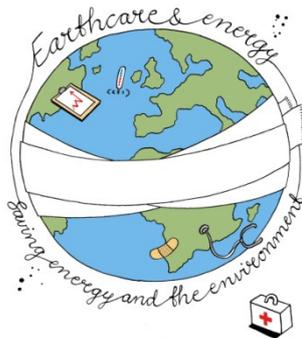
A useful approach in equipping Champions is:

- Tell them why
- Show them how
- Get them started
- Keep them going
- Get them to pass it on

Much communication with Champions can be electronically such as on-line Champions Forum. But face-to-face involvement is important and can be achieved by:

- Training
- Walkabouts with them in their areas
- 'Buddy system' with other Champions so they audit each others' areas
- Lunchtime surgeries with other Champions
- Social events, e.g., Christmas party for Champions
- Recognition events, e.g. Chief Executive giving Champions signed and framed 'thank you' certificates

At a large acute London NHS Trust the Champions were given a special lanyard for their security passes with the campaign logo and name printed. The rest of the staff had to use the NHS standard blue lanyards so the Champions stood out.



James Murphy (right) on walkabout with Champions at Guy's & St. Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust, London

8. Importance of Supportive Structures

Before recruiting and training a network of Energy Champions it is important to plan ahead and anticipate what resources and structures are needed to implement ideas the Champions generate and having a budget to do so. Also Champions will have questions and challenges they will want answering.

To avoid isolation the Champion will need regular contact and support – either face-to-face, electronically or keeping in touch with each other. Quite often this aspect can be under-estimated in the planning stage so it is important to give this aspect careful consideration. Otherwise all the effort going into recruiting and training Champions will dissipate.

9. Conclusion

The role of Champions in any campaign is vital. Oliver Blach writing in *The Guardian* summarised the situation well:

“Everything we do as individuals for the environment is effective only to the extent that by doing it we somehow manage to change the beliefs and behaviours of other people, and to equip them to go persuading and equipping others.

The environmental problem is mainly a behavioural problem. Therefore as environmentalists we are mainly in the business of changing behaviour. And behaviour changes one person at a time.”