

LEADERSHIP &
TRANSPARENCY

Women in CSR: Tamara "TJ" DiCaprio, Microsoft

Words by Andrea Newell



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Welcome to our series of interviews with leading female CSR practitioners where we are learning about what inspires these women and how they found their way to careers in sustainability. Read the rest of the series [here](#).

TriplePundit: Briefly describe your role and responsibilities, and how many years you have been in the business.

Tamara "TJ" DiCaprio: As senior director of environmental sustainability, I'm responsible for reducing the environmental impact of Microsoft's operations. Working closely with the [Environmental Sustainability](#), [Corporate Citizenship](#) and Finance teams, in the last few years I've helped develop an internal carbon footprint strategy, establish an internal governance model and shape the direction of our internal corporate carbon reduction policy.

I feel like I've been in the environmental field all my life. My passion for the environment started early on when my parents opened my eyes to the world of nature. The initial event that catalyzed my commitment was the Santa Barbara Oil Spill of 1969, which helped foster the environmental movement. As a result, I

was lucky enough to grow up during a very active time in developing U.S. national environmental policy. I graduated from the University of California at Santa Barbara (UCSB) as one of the first groups of students with a degree in environmental studies in 1981. My professors and colleagues have continued to be a strong influence. These days I often return to UCSB as a guest lecturer to share best practices and continue my education, and I'm currently enrolled in the [Sustainable MBA program at Marylhurst University](#).

Over the years I have been on many expeditions—sailing, hiking and flying—through different parts of the world studying impacts to fragile island environments. I have taken an active role in conservation through different organizations such as the Forterra organization, Marine Conservation Institute, New York Explorer Club (on flag expeditions where the club lends numbered copies of the club flag for field research intended to collect scientific data on remote areas of the world), Pacific Island Research Institute, Santa Barbara Maritime Museum and World Wildlife Fund.

Professionally, I have worked for Microsoft for just over 15 years and have over 25 years of experience designing global business models for corporations such as Intel, Merrill Lynch, and Microsoft. To help develop the profession of climate change professionals, I am a member of the Board of Directors of the Association of Climate Change Officers and co-founder of the Women's Climate Collaborative, helping empower young women to higher levels of contribution.

3p: How has the sustainability program evolved at your company?

TC: While environmental sustainability has been on Microsoft's agenda for many years, we stepped up our commitment in 2009 when we set a target to reduce our carbon emissions by 30 percent per unit of revenue

by 2012, based on 2007 levels. Once we achieved this target in July 2012, we made a new pledge: to be carbon neutral. Our carbon neutral policy includes initiatives to be lean, be green, and be accountable.

One of the ways we stay accountable is by putting an internal price on carbon and charging business groups for the cost to offset their emissions related to energy consumption and air travel through a carbon fee model. The effect is that we are now internalizing sustainability across our business, and being a technology company we're often looking to technology as part of our strategy. For example, we've partnered with some external vendors on a project we call [88 Acres](#) that has enabled us to turn our Redmond, Wash., campus into a "smart city" of sorts, using software to connect more than 100 buildings and tens of thousands of sensors to capture 500 million data transactions every day. We're using that data to quickly address inefficiencies, which is expected to save 6–10 percent in energy consumption each year. We've since partnered with the city of Seattle on a similar project in Seattle's downtown core, the first of what we hope will be many opportunities for other organizations to use this smart building technology.

3p: Tell us about someone (mentor, sponsor, friend, hero) who affected your sustainability journey, and how.

TC: Rob Bernard, Microsoft's Chief Environmental Strategist. Rob's leadership has empowered me to reach out beyond traditional approaches and experiment with new ideas. He's given me the freedom to take some risk and be creative with strategies for reducing Microsoft's environmental impact so we can effect real and widespread change in the business. I would not have been as successful as I have been in this role without his support.

3p: What is the best advice you have ever received?

TC: Two quotations are always with me: “be the change you want to see in the world” from Mahatma Gandhi, and “do a little more each day than you think you can” from Lowell Thomas. Together, they reflect the vision, values, philosophy, and “right” bold action that guide me every day. They inspire me to be curious and to push myself to make the greatest contribution I can.

3p: Can you share a recent accomplishment you are especially proud of?

TC: Professionally, I am proud of the work that my team did to establish a carbon neutral corporate policy at Microsoft and successfully design and implement the corporate carbon fee model to drive accountability across the business. These represent a substantial commitment to supporting efficiency, renewable energy, and investments in carbon offset projects, which in turn will help to accelerate the development of a low-carbon economy. I find it inspirational to see what a simple model can do to change the culture of an organization.

3p: If you had the power to make one major change at your company or in your industry, what would it be?

TC: It sounds tactical, but I feel that organizations need to move from theory into practical application to really demonstrate their environmental responsibility. If I had the power, I would have more organizations adopt a simple consumption-based carbon fee model similar to Microsoft’s. A carbon fee model establishes a structure to drive accountability and raise funds for projects that will help increase the supply and demand for renewable energy and support a sustainable economy, education, jobs, and conservation.

3p: Describe your perfect day.

TC: Professionally, my best days are those when I get to bring together engaged, motivated people to create environmental solutions. My work in implementing the Microsoft carbon fee model is a great example of this. I have had the opportunity to collaborate with dedicated individuals from across the business as well as external associations to come up with a novel way to address our internal environmental footprint, while at the same time supporting projects that help our planet and develop sustainable communities.

Personally, my perfect day would include volunteering for environmental projects such as installing solar PV panels in remote villages to help people benefit from innovative technology. We just completed a project like this on Nuku Hiva in the Marquesas island archipelago in French Polynesia. Any day when I can take my golden retriever named “Diego” to reconnect with the natural world helps me to stay energized.



ANDREA NEWELL  

Andrea Newell has more than ten years of experience designing, developing and writing ERP e-learning materials for large corporations in several industries. She was a consultant for PricewaterhouseCoopers and a contract consultant for companies like IBM, BP, Marathon Oil, Pfizer, and Steelcase, among others. She is a writer and former editor at TriplePundit and a social media blog fellow at The Story of Stuff Project. She has contributed to In Good Company (Vault's CSR blog), Evolved Employer, The Glass Hammer, EcoLocalizer and CSRwire. She is a volunteer at the West Michigan Environmental Action Council and lives in Grand Rapids, Michigan. You can reach her at andrea.g.newell@gmail.com and [@aneuwell3p](https://twitter.com/aneuwell3p) on Twitter.

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