



# A Roadmap for Net Zero

When it comes to achieving Net Zero, executives must be prepared to lead from the front. Community Members tell **Marc Barber** how they have risen to the challenge by rediscovering an entrepreneurial mindset

**A**t Criticleye's recent Global Sustainability Forum, it was made clear that Boards must be brave when it comes to innovation, partnerships and investing for the long term. The danger is that executives, along with policymakers and governments, set objectives for reducing carbon emissions without making the tough calls that will bring about lasting change.

**Mark Spelman**, Strategic Adviser for the World Economic Forum and a Board Mentor at Criticleye, said: "Climate ambition matters because the current country commitments are not going to deliver the Paris agreement. Major countries will need to step-up the scale and speed of their emission reductions going forward to get us onto a 1.5-degree Celsius track."

He added that when COP26 is held later this year, it'll need to avoid hyperbole and rhetoric. "The key thing to watch out for in 2021 climate announcements is an over-focus on targets and an under-focus on roadmaps and execution. Commitments matter to get us back on track, but this decade of climate action needs roadmaps with clarity on priorities. The challenge for both countries and companies is to bridge the gap between intent and execution."

The devil, as the saying goes, lies in the detail. At the start of the Virtual Forum, attendees from companies around the world were asked to use one word to describe their organisation's approach to sustainability. While many stated that it was "central" and

"pioneering" to their business, others admitted that it was "siloed", "confusing", "pedestrian" and even "non-existent".

## Sky's the Limit

It explains why there is such a thirst for knowledge from senior executives around how to turn strategic pledges to reduce carbon emissions into operational realities. In some ways, it's an opportunity for large organisations to rediscover an entrepreneurial mindset, as without that openness to new ideas and appetite for risk, they're going to struggle.

**Michael Lewis**, Chief Executive Officer for E.ON UK, explained: "Leading the energy transition means being the first to advocate a certain course of action. >



It means making decisions which don't necessarily give you an immediate economic payback, but which state your purpose and your intent while building credibility. Ours is based on a view of where we expect the market to go, because we believe we are leading to a zero-carbon future.

"For instance, we started investing in heat pumps three or four years ago. They're a loss leader, but we know that it's coming. We're prepared to invest to build our knowledge, understanding and capability, so that we're ready when the market has moved to where we're leading... It's not about optimising for the short term, it's about optimising for the long term and taking decisions which show that intent."

**Lucinda Langton**, former Director for Sustainable Packaging at Coca-Cola Europacific Partners, told the audience how the business set about executing on its 2017 sustainability plan. One of its critical commitments was to collect 100 percent of its packaging, so they needed to create a roadmap to execute on this goal.

She said: "First of all, we undertook an exercise to understand the status of collection in our markets. We also tracked the issue of plastic packaging through social media listening and developed a P&L model to understand how the trend could impact the business. Coming out of that, we proposed a new sustainable packaging strategy to the leadership team."

It was necessary to break down and analyse each aspect of the process. "For new goals like this one, we found it was fundamental to first understand the different sources of collection data," she

*“Leading the energy transition means being the first to advocate a certain course of action”*

commented. "Having a much better view of how collection rates are calculated and their robustness, we have subsequently been able to build routines to review and track progress annually. Getting involved at this level of detail, to build the right strategy, is critical to success in my view."

Although the tone and urgency ought to come from the top of the organisation, CEOs and senior executives must be encouraging openness around new thinking. **Miguel Veiga-Pestana**, SVP, Corporate Affairs & Chief Sustainability Officer at Reckitt, explained how the company recently ran a "Freedom Forum" event, which incentivised people to come up with ideas to make the business more sustainable. "Over the course of three days, we generated 300 new ideas that came from people across the business," he said, adding that "this is really at the heart of it".

In terms of the role of the Chief Communications and Sustainability Officers, **Miguel** feels that they're the ones who can bring an outside perspective and act as a fulcrum for transformation. He went on: "Ownership really sits with the leadership of the company. It [also] sits with every

employee, and every person who works there, because each individual has the ability to make a change."

**Matthew Blagg**, CEO of Criticaleye, said: "When it comes to sustainability and Net Zero, collaboration and partnerships are essential if organisations are to be successful. That's why it is vital for senior leaders to have external reference points, so they are able to get different insights and points of view."

No leadership team or Board can afford to be inward-looking and insular when it comes to driving the sustainability agenda. ■

Click [here](#) for more information on Criticaleye's CEO Retreat, taking place on 14th and 15th October 2021. This event will focus on Putting Sustainability at the Heart of Strategy.

Featuring Commentary From:

-  **Matthew Blagg**  
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-  **Lucinda Langton**  
Former Director, Sustainable Packaging, Coca-Cola Europacific Partners
-  **Michael Lewis**  
CEO  
E.ON UK
-  **Mark Spelman**  
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