

# SCENE SUMMARY GUIDE

# so right so smart

86 MINUTE VERSION

## Prologue

*This is the introduction to Ray Anderson's story.*

Ray Anderson was a successful entrepreneur. Stealing his grandchildren's future was not the legacy he wanted to leave behind; he did not know about the environmental impacts of the industrial system of which his company was a part. Once he was enlightened, he made it his goal to transform his company, Interface, into a steward of the earth.

## We Were a Well-Oiled Machine

*This is a summary of Interface's history before the "Spear in the Chest."*

Ray Anderson founded Interface in 1973. It was a renegade from the start, producing a revolutionary carpet product called carpet tiles. Ray was an inspired individual willing to take risks. When he saw carpet tile and realized its advantages over traditional carpet, he thought to himself, "That is so right, so smart." Ray's instinct was correct: carpet tile became a sought-after flooring product for office environments. Interface thrived in the mid- '70s and '80s, growing 70% a year. Towards the late '80s, Ray knew the next step had to be taken – he just wasn't sure what it was. But then a question from a customer set in motion a series of events that would change Interface's path forever.

## Spear in the Chest

*This is the story of Ray's epiphany.*

Interface's sustainability journey began when a series of events converged. Interface's West Coast customers began asking "what are you doing about the environment?" As the CEO, Ray Anderson was asked to address the question, but had no answer. Serendipitously, around the same time, Ray was given a copy of Paul Hawken's *The Ecology of Commerce*. He said the experience of reading the book was like a "spear in the chest" – as he realized the impact the industrial system was wreaking on the environment. The epiphany that Ray experienced caused him to devise an entirely new vision for his company: to move toward environmental sustainability: to "meet the needs of the present generation without sacrificing the needs of future generations."

## Tomorrow's Child

*This is a description of the early years of Interface's sustainability journey.*

When Ray Anderson revealed his vision for sustainability to his company on August 31, 1994, employees wondered what this vision would mean for them. The announcement was met with surprise and skepticism; some employees wondered whether it was just the next marketing "angle." Ray held steadfast to his new values, and it became clear that this new vision of sustainability for Interface was not going away. Slowly, person by person, a few began to "get it." Ray first realized that his message was making an impact when one of his employees sent him a poem entitled Tomorrow's Child. The thought that he was finally starting to get through was encouraging to Ray. He felt that his primary role in these first few years was to inspire his people. A fierce competitor and a voracious learner, Ray educated himself by reading publications from leading sustainability authors & advocates of the day. He eventually recruited many of these experts to become the Interface "Dream Team": a group of mentors that could help guide Interface up mount sustainability.

## The Power of One

*A meeting in Hawaii becomes a turning point for employee engagement.*

In "The Power of One," we see a microcosmic success story that became a turning point for Interface. Scheduled to have a 1200-person meeting at one of the most wasteful hotels in Hawaii, Interface used the opportunity to treat the hotel as a real-life experiment. Through their behavioral changes over the course of a week, Interface employees produced significant environmental improvements, saved the hotel, \$860,000, and left with a \$1 million carpet order. As they saw impacts and benefits of their contributions, employees began to become engaged in Interface's sustainability mission.

## Just the Right Thing to Do

*Although Interface changed its vision toward sustainability mid-course, some companies were founded with environmental values at their core.*

In this segment we meet Gary Hirshberg, CE-Yo of Stonyfield Farm Yogurt, Yvon Chouinard, CEO of Patagonia, and Jeffrey Hollender of Seventh Generation. These companies provide working examples of how environmental stewardship can enhance financial success. A lesson in ROI (return on investment) demonstrates how investing at present can yield payoffs in the future. When Interface realized returns that were possible from investing in the goal of sustainability, they learned about a better way to make a bigger profit.

## The Best They've Ever Been

*This segment highlights the innovations that have come from Interface's change of mindset.*

With the value of sustainability guiding their processes, Interface became a hotbed of sustainability innovation. Their first big success was a program called Quest. Quest redefined waste as “anything that didn't provide value to the customer.” The cost savings brought by Quest funded other sustainability initiatives. Studying nature (biomimicry) led to incredible innovation in the way Interface designed the patterns for its floor covering. These innovations made Interface's products the the best they had ever been.

## Survival Mode

*In tough economic times, instead of abandoning its environmental vision, Interface clung to it even more tightly.*

When the recession of 1999 hit, Interface faced questioning from investors about whether it could afford to maintain its environmental standards. The company unanimously agreed that the sustainability mission was now part of their and would never be abandoned. They survived the storm: the way out of the economic crisis turned out to be through greater green innovation.

## This is Good Business

*Innovation drives good business.*

Challenging people to think and behave differently will drive innovation. Herman-Miller has been known for environmentally responsible processes and superior products since 1950. Paul Murray shares some of his insight about the company's practices. Herman Miller has also been a part of the green building movement - another important industry making strides in sustainability innovation. In the Clifton Park Library, we see a practical example of how green buildings not only bring efficiency and cost savings, but aesthetic advantages over traditional buildings.

## You Can't Contain Yourself to a Brochure

*When companies put a stake in the ground, they open themselves up to scrutiny.*

Now that it's “hip to be green,” there are many companies promoting themselves as “green.” But many of these companies are not actually committed to the value of sustainability; they are just jumping on the marketing bandwagon. As awareness grows about the importance of environmental stewardship, many companies have difficulty learning the line between sharing their positive actions (transparency) and risking over-promotion (greenwashing). The public is more scrutinizing than ever, so it is important to be truthful and data-driven.

## The Followers Make the Leader

*As Interface's mission solidified, the employees began to take on Ray's vision as their own.*

Ray Anderson may have started the sustainability initiative at Interface, but his employees made great strides in finding new sources of innovation. Examples include reducing the impact of landfill gas by burning it for process heat, and TacTiles – a biomimetic product that revolutionized carpet tiles once again by bonding them to each other instead of gluing them to the floor.

## Rock Stars

*Environmental advocates have become the new rock stars, and many rock stars have become environmental advocates.*

Adam Garner and Lauren Sullivan of Reverb and Steven Page of Barenaked Ladies are making great strides in reducing the impact of music tours. Meanwhile, people like Ray Anderson, Janine Benyus, Paul Hawken, and David Suzuki have become environmental “rock stars.” Through their outreach, speeches, publications, and evangelization, they are raising awareness about sustainability and gaining ground for the movement.

## There’s a Caption Here

*Sustainability should be a universal principle of best practice for business.*

Cornell’s MBA graduate business program in sustainability is featured here as Stuart Hart describes the benefits of this kind of thinking for the long term success of Cornell’s graduate students. Ray Anderson influences Wal-Mart to develop a large-scale sustainability program that has had enormous benefits to the company. Paul Hawken and Yvon Chouinard describe some of these benefits and recognize Wal-Mart for these positive steps.

## A Good Place to Be

Ray leaves us with a positive vision for the next industrial revolution. A new paradigm of ecological commerce will emerge when we move from the “take-make-waste” model to a more circular “closed loop system.” There are unlimited opportunities that sustainability can bring in the future. Ray Anderson challenges us to make a choice about how we will interact with the earth: “help it” or “hurt it.”