

1.5 Principles & Practices of “Integral Sustainability”

In the last decade, “green” has gone mainstream. This is good news not only for the planet, but also for business. Consumers want to make more sustainable lifestyle choices—whether it’s for hybrid cars, non-toxic cleaning supplies, or organic groceries. By serving this growing market, smart, forward-thinking businesses are innovating ways to grow and make a profit *while* contributing to solving our world’s big challenges.

At Nick’s we’re proud to have built our restaurants partly out of recycled dairy barns. Not only did we rescue the old, beautiful lumber from going into a landfill, but also we created a warm, earthy space that our guests love. And we’re constantly looking for new and better ways to reduce waste, save energy, and support our local economy. For example, we’re now sourcing our cheese and sausage from local and regional suppliers when available.

Yet for us, “sustainability” means more than our stewardship of natural resources. We take the sustainability of our *human resources* just as seriously. In fact, our concept of sustainability includes *both* external-focused practices such as recycling *and* internal, human practices such as personal development training. By combining an exterior/natural and an interior/human focus, we arrive at an integrated—or “integral” (meaning balanced and whole)—concept of sustainability.

While conventional sustainability aims to improve the health of the environment, our “integral sustainability” also addresses the mental, emotional, and spiritual health of our workplace and team members. For example:

- Through our “safe space” communication program, we encourage the healthy resolution of conflicts, while creating crucial feedback loops for management.
- Through our career-training program, we empower our team members economically by teaching key leadership skills. (This includes our acclaimed “trust and track” system for nurturing peak performance and purpose-aligned behaviors.)
- And through our integral transformative practice (ITP) program, we create regular opportunities to explore awareness-training exercises such as meditation.

Thus, as we’re helping sustain our planet, we’re also sustaining our people. And it’s setting us apart from our competition in a serious way.

The restaurant industry is notorious for its high turnover rate—and it’s no secret why. It can be tough, stressful work meeting guests’ demands, on your feet all day in a fast-paced work environment, often without personal recognition or the support of a healthy workplace culture. It’s not surprising that as soon as a better opportunity opens up, people are out the door.

In effect, the work “uses up” the employee’s time and energy in exchange for a paycheck and tips, but not much else. In the worst cases, it’s a “slash and burn” philosophy. Usually, it’s just

really inefficient. A long-term, mutually enriching, *sustainable* relationship between restaurant and team member is the exception rather than the rule. What a wasted opportunity!

What would it look like if a company took both natural *and human* sustainability seriously? What if we systematized the process of sustaining our team members' lives with more than just a paycheck?

- How about a turnover rate of *less than 20%* annually (the industry average is 150-200%)?
- How about a consistently extraordinary customer experience *that is only possible* because of the “human touch” we cultivate—over time, with a well-defined training program and sophisticated developmental practices—in dedicated employees who become inspired by, and aligned with, our purpose?
- How about the lift we give to our young team members (65% are under 25 years old), by providing them with tools to help them flourish in their lives and future careers, encouraging them to contribute to society in a meaningful way.

Our ethic of sustainability also extends to the community where we are located. In fact, “rooted” would be a better word because, just like a big tree, our strength comes from the depth of our community roots.

While we actively and regularly support local organizations through fundraisers, donations, and providing a warm, supportive meeting place, we also try to go above and beyond. For instance, recently, to help our guests struggling with the economic recession and high unemployment in our area, we decided to offer half price on our pizzas on Mondays and Tuesdays. It cost us the equivalent of 1.1 million dollars over two years, but it was 100% worth it to feed our struggling neighbors and let them know we care.

Indeed, our community knows that *we mean it* when we say our purpose is to “provide *this* community with an unforgettable place; to connect with family and friends; to have fun and feel at home!” So naturally, they return the favor, blessing us with their consistent patronage and loyalty.

That’s what we mean by “integral sustainability” at a human level. It’s not something we do just occasionally to burnish our image—it’s a core part of our business identity and a long-term strategy for economic, cultural, and personal growth.

Yes, we love pizza and we believe we make the world’s greatest pizza! And, the real “secret sauce” of our success has nothing to do with our pizza and everything to do with the sustainable human relationships we cultivate with our team members and our community.

Nick's 4 Quadrants of Natural and Human [aka "Integral"] Sustainability

Upper-Left: Promoting the mental, emotional, and spiritual health of our team members.	Upper-Right: Teaching and tracking peak performance and purpose-aligned behaviors.
Lower-Left: Cultivating a healthy workplace culture and strong community roots.	Lower-Right: Striving to be wise and caring stewards of our environment.