CDI PRACTITIONER TAKEAWAYS

Opening up green careers

10 practical tips from our conversation with Martin Baxter, Deputy CEO of ISEP

The following tips are drawn from a CDI interview with Martin Baxter, Deputy CEO of the Institute of Sustainability and Environmental Professionals (ISEP). They reflect Martin's 34 years in the environment and sustainability profession, and are shared to spark reflection on your own practice. They are not formal CDI guidance - green jobs vary by region and change over time, so as always, please use these tips in the context of your own professional judgement.

WHY IT MATTERS

Many young people feel anxious about climate change, and many assume green careers are only for scientists. Advisers can open up a far wider range of routes than most clients realise.

Where the growth is

Martin points to three areas where long-term investment is creating jobs across a wide range of roles:

Energy

Renewables and the infrastructure behind the energy transition

Water

Drought, flooding, river quality and an ageing supply network

Circular economy

Repairing products and bringing materials back into use

Beyond these specialist sectors, green roles are now found across the economy, including in manufacturing, property and facilities management, and the NHS.

10 tips to take into your next client session

1

Start with the problem, not the job title

Clients rarely know green job titles, but many know which issues they care about - climate, nature, water, waste, fashion or food. Starting there makes the conversation real.

Try this: ask which environmental issue matters most to your client, then explore two or three roles that tackle it.

2

Every job can be a green job

Sustainability is becoming part of every organisation, much like health and safety or finance. Whatever sector a client is drawn to, there's likely to be a green angle within it.

Try this: when a client names a sector, look together for the sustainability roles and responsibilities inside it.

3

Look beyond STEM

Science and engineering matter, but they aren't the only way in. Martin highlights growing demand for behavioural scientists, communicators and people who can engage communities and win hearts and minds.

Try this: include at least one green role in communication, behaviour change or community engagement when discussing options.

4

Don't forget the skilled trades

Some of the biggest gaps are practical. Martin points to a shortage of cable jointers to connect new renewable energy infrastructure.

Try this: make apprenticeships and technical routes part of every green careers conversation.

5

Follow the investment

Energy, water and the circular economy are attracting long-term investment, which brings jobs at every level. What that looks like varies from area to area.

Try this: check your local labour market information for energy, water and waste projects planned near you.

6 Turn worry into agency

Martin sees an element of despair in some young people's concern about the planet. A career can be a practical way to be part of the solution - in software, healthcare, fashion and far beyond.

Try this: when a client mentions climate worry, ask how they might like to be part of the solution through their work.

7 Passion needs practical skills

Enthusiastic graduates can get frustrated when they know what needs to happen but can't yet bring others with them. Communication, collaboration and getting things done count as much as conviction.

Try this: help passionate clients find ways to gain experience of planning and delivering a project.

8 Career changers aren't starting from scratch

Adults switching careers often bring the transferable skills green employers want. What they usually need to add is technical knowledge of sustainability.

Try this: map a career changer's existing skills against ISEP's Sustainability Skills Map, then identify the knowledge gaps.

9 Network your way in

Martin started by volunteering, then asked to shadow colleagues in his own time. Building a network of people doing the work you want to do is one of the best ways to create opportunities.

Try this: encourage clients to find one person doing work they're curious about and ask for a conversation.

10 Use the free tools

ISEP's Green Careers Hub sets out what green roles involve day to day and the skills they need, which gives clients something concrete to explore.

Try this: explore one Green Careers Hub job profile with a client during a session.

THE ANALOGY TO REMEMBER

Think of finance. Every organisation needs it and everyone needs some financial literacy, but we still need financial experts. Sustainability is going the same way: we need specialists, and green skills in every role.

IF YOU REMEMBER ONE THING

Show them they can be part of the solution.

The career choices people make can give them a real say in tackling the environmental challenges they worry about.

Martin Baxter's key message for careers advisers

Good to know

The Environment Act 2021 requires government to set legally binding targets for biodiversity, water, air quality, and waste and resources, and to report to Parliament on progress. Martin largely drafted the Act's opening section at his kitchen table. Long-term commitments like this help underpin demand for green skills.

About ISEP

Martin Baxter is Deputy CEO of the Institute of Sustainability and Environmental Professionals (ISEP), the professional body for people working in environment and sustainability. He has worked at the Institute for 34 years and chairs an International Organization for Standardization (ISO) group developing global environmental standards.

FIND OUT MORE

Green Careers Hub
ISEP's free hub on green jobs and pathways. | greencareershub.com

Sustainability Skills Map
Skills that sustainability roles need. | isepglobal.org

Green job profiles
What green roles involve day to day. | greencareershub.com

ISEP
The professional body for sustainability. | isepglobal.org