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When Environmentalism and an Entrepreneur Meet

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Buddy Boyd is the founder of Gibsons Recycling Depot (www.gibsonsrecycling.ca), the first and largest non-government funded resource recovery park in British Columbia. Unlike community and regional district taxpayer funded recycling operations, Gibsons Recycling is a business. It doesn't take a penny from government. It employs people from the community it serves. Its employees pay taxes. The company pays taxes. And unlike government recycling efforts, this is a cost effective and efficient operation.

Gibsons Recycling is the Canadian epicenter of a growing international zero-waste movement. What this essentially means is that every piece of "garbage" that arrives at Buddy's depot in the heart of Gibsons on BC's Sunshine Coast is recycled for some other productive use. The basic thesis behind this business model is that we are a throw-away society. We waste as a matter of culture, ignorance, and sheer neglect. And besides destroying our environment, waste is costing all of us huge sums of money.

As a society, we are more environmentally aware than ever. Yet we still don't know nearly enough.

For example, how many of us really ask ourselves where our garbage goes and how it is treated once we have disposed of it in one of many "recycling" bins in our community? Until recently, I for one didn't give it much thought. But it is our duty to be informed.

As Gibsons Recycling informs us, modern society has developed what can be described as cheap, transportation-based "Integrated Waste Management" systems. This has not worked as the long term (and now short term) costs become more and more obvious. Shipping increasing waste and recyclables overseas for processing is not only expensive it exports jobs and stifles innovation and new age technologies. And the carbon footprint is tough to quantify, but it is massive.

Zero waste is a whole system approach to addressing these problems. Zero waste saves money, leads to innovation, creates jobs, involves far less transportation, and solves landfill problems.

Zero waste operations are gaining broader acceptance as new technologies are developed that allow the system to be used economically on a small scale. On the Sunshine Coast, arguably one of the places with one of the most environmentally aware populations in Canada, options for recycling, garbage collection, and landfill use are being currently debated.

Zero waste is an idea whose time has come.

Buddy Boyd is in Florianopolis, Brazil this weekend speaking as an expert panelist at the 7th annual Zero Waste International Alliance conference. He is recognized as one of the world's leading experts on the practical application of a zero waste business model.

Like any entrepreneur, Buddy has run up against ardent and powerful defenders of the status quo. He continues to fight entrenched interests opposed to common sense solutions to a big societal challenge. He does so with a passion and steadfastness that some of us call admirable. Others believe his relentlessness and zeal are pains in the posterior.

Well, if he is, Canada needs more "pains" like Buddy Boyd.

Gibsons Recycling is an example of a home-grown "national champion" that we have a responsibility to support and nurture. And as an entrepreneur, Buddy Boyd is a powerful change agent. By definition, that frightens and intimidates those with a strong vested interest in the status quo. However, governments have much to learn from front line innovators like Buddy. And as taxpayers, we should all insist that they do.

Through his example, he is showing that there's absolutely no contradiction whatsoever between building a prosperous economy and leaving our planet cleaner for future generations.

In fact, in the 21st century, they are inextricably linked. Firms like Gibsons Recycling and trail-blazing entrepreneurs like Buddy Boyd are a fundamental and urgent necessity if Canada is to be the productive, competitive, innovative, and clean economy that we surely must become.