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Interview with Julian Crawford Founding Member of EcoSTEPS +61413441355

## EcoSTEPS

### **1. EcoSTEPS, is a unique Consultancy Firm, which is innovative in two ways.**

- **Longevity and Pioneering:** EcoSTEPS is an 8 years old Australian based consultancy which provides services to organizations who seek to address sustainability issues in their businesses. EcoSTEPS is innovative in that it is one of the oldest such consultancy services in Australia. Julian Crawford, one of its founding members says 'EcoSTEPS was about 5 years ahead of its time. ' Awareness is growing in Australia, but significant confusion still exists between 'tactical' sustainable activities, and truly 'strategically embedded sustainability practices,' that will give client's strategic and competitive advantage while honoring the triple bottom line. A visit to their website [www.EcoSTEPS.com.au](http://www.EcoSTEPS.com.au) shows some of their clients, their vision, and values.

- **EcoSTEPS is also innovative in the business model it is evolving.** It is committed to shaping itself on sustainable principles, for both the Firm as an entity and for its constituents.

It is based on a profit model and its membership has increased from its 3 original Founders to 20 associated. Julian, says that EcoSTEPS 'is part of a bigger dream' which includes 'Ecosphere' a Trust which is funded by 1% of gross revenue and the 'third leg' of EcoSTEPS is 'Catalyst', which is an impressive data base of 400 CVs of high quality transformational change agents. It is based on Hock's 'Chaordic Principles' (Hock, D. *"Birth of the Chaordic Age"* Barrett-Koehler, 1999) How Catalyst will become part of the business model is not yet clear.

Julian describes EcoSTEPS as 'virtual' in that no one earns a salary. It is and that is a brand under which its shareholders work and collaborate (while also serving

other clients outside of EcoSTEPS). Currently the model sees 20% of any earnings by shareholders go to core costs and infrastructure with 80% being distributed amongst the team who actually delivers the service.

According to Julian, they are at another turning point in their modeling for their company. Business is now definitely better, and they have just paid their shareholders the second return after 5 years of losses and shareholder loans are now repaid. They are currently in the process of redefining their shareholder policies in respect of payouts, presently working on the basis of 20% to core costs, including greenhouse gas payments, costs of winning business and developing IP etc, and building in an additional payment to people for work they do internally which they call 'work for equity'. 20% of the share capital can be distributed for efforts of this nature.

What is also abundantly clear is that while their business model may be a work in progress, their vision, their motivation, their aspiration and commitment is vital, strong and ever present and the eventual shape of their business model will portray that.

## **2 & 3. The Impact of the Innovation- The Motivation and Purpose**

Impact can be considered from at least three perspectives, the client, the constituents and society as a whole.

- **For the Client:**

Julian was candid in his assessment of their effectiveness to date when assessing the impact of their interventions; "We do not have adequate KPIs around these things, and so we cannot always get hard measures of our effectiveness." He spoke of the many validations that had come from testimonials of clients, indeed their growing business is rooted almost solely on client recommendations. EcoSTEPS recognises that this is not enough in itself and they seek greater rigor

in their own assessments to allow them to refine their own practices and IP, and to make their distinctiveness recognizable to prospective clients. One of the challenges he said was that it is hard to know how to think about such interventions, “Is sustainability a journey or a destination or a combination of the two, and how does one measure these?”

Their website has stories of the impacts they have created for some of their clients. Julian spoke with pride about two.

**Randwick City Council** won a top sustainability award for their 20 year strategic plan. EcoSTEPS helped them by bringing to their awareness other examples of best practice in this field, particularly the United Nations local government sustainability principles. The council employed a process where they widely engaged the community in the process.

**Yarra Valley Water:** EcoSTEPS ran a series of half day workshops for the 350 employees designed to extend the company's commitment to sustainability. In these the employees explored ideas and solutions they had been using within their own families to increase sustainability at an individual level. Sustainability began to permeate beyond the client organisation to the wider community.

- **For EcoSTEPS Members- What is the motivation and purpose behind belonging to EcoSTEPS:**

Around 1998, Julian met St John Miall and Carol Young, who were both reassessing their lives and views on the world. The three shared a view that ‘the world was fraying around the edges’, and all felt that they wanted to do something to help. They became involved and accredited with a process out of Sweden called “Natural Step”, which is fundamentally a consensus community engagement process, employing core principles of public forums and the sciences. They all trained as practitioners of this system, but it never really took off in Australia. Frustrated, they formed EcoSTEPS as a fee for service

consultancy firm which had 'Natural Steps' as part of its jigsaw of offerings. Another 10 people who were interested in 'Natural Steps' began to meet monthly, and eventually 6 of these were invited as shareholders into EcoSTEPS, with the shareholder numbers now hovering around 20. The Firm grew organically and encountered many of the usual challenges associated with increase in size and complexity, not least of all that their original 'consensus decision' making process became more and more challenging. It is now more formally structured with a board, and 4 of its shareholders as directors of that board. Julian describes many of his colleagues as 'corporate refugees' who have traveled a lot, and are mutually concerned for the world. EcoSTEPS is providing a powerful vehicle for its shareholders to extend their reach into corporate Australia and to share best practices and spur innovations together. It is a community in itself, a home for some of Australia's most innovative and 'sustainably minded' change agents, both directly and through 'Catalyst'. Julian believes that a limitation in the model today, is that EcoSTEPS is not in a position to pay any retainers, and so they find they have a skewed demographic as they cannot sustain younger people who may be at a stage in their lives where they need that level of security. They are seeking to find creative ways to address this.

EcoSTEPS members have many questions which they continue to mull over. Indeed, they have Quarterly get-togethers called "Composts", where they dialogue about 'what does it mean to be a sustainable individual', 'how do we build a sustainable business with sustainable individuals', 'how do we attract the right talent,' 'how do we sell our wares in the market place.'

- **For Society as a Whole**

Julian believes most organizations in Australia are still 5 years away from really grappling with issues of sustainability, even though they have a growing awareness about it. Julian said, "Since 2000 global generic principles have

become pretty well understood with some awareness of ‘life cycle analysis and footprint’”; however a real mindset shift is still required.” The opportunity for EcoSTEPS is that they could be a leader in this field as they have longevity and a track history of success.

While EcoStep’s members remain a little frustrated that their small size does not afford them a large ‘organisational reach’, they are significantly helping to contribute to the necessary mindset shift. They continue to develop some highly effective IP and their reach is extending. They have a determination to expand their client base using the following matrix

	<b>CORPORATE</b>	<b>GOVERNMENT</b>	<b>CIVIL SOCIETY</b>
<b>LARGE</b>	<i>Internationals</i>	<i>Federal</i>	<i>Academia</i>
<b>MEDIUM</b>	<i>National</i>	<i>State</i>	<i>NGOs</i>
<b>SMALL</b>	<i>SMEs</i>	<i>Local</i>	<i>Community</i>

As I was personally recommended to interview Julian by staff at McKinsey and Company, a global consulting firm, it is apparent that their credibility and reputation is significant.

#### **4. My Experience**

I was attracted to EcoSTEPS because of the people I knew who were associated with it. I have personally known one of its founding members St John Miall for many years. St John, a man before his time, has always felt deeply about the environment and was a co-founder of the Banksia Awards (which I write about in a separately submitted story.) When I realized this was another brain child of St John and his friends, I knew it would be a story worth hearing and retelling.

I found Julian a fascinating, passionate and dynamic person. He would personify for me ‘a student of life.’ Eclectic in his skill set, with a widely varied life

experience, he brings experience; know how, determination and vision to EcoSTEPS.

Originally from the UK Julian has been settled in Australia for some time, after living in the US for some time. Originally a Zoology graduate, he worked for about 15 years at a professional services accounting firm. As promotion to partnership got closer and closer, he decided that it wasn't the life for him. His tenure at the firm gave him a tremendous exposure to and expertise in the 'business side' of business, with detailed studies in 'big business accounting systems'. He then had a momentous life change and moved to the USA and became involved for many years in a network marketing organisation. During that time he reported that he 'sharpened his interpersonal skills' and became very familiar with the core of 'micro business' models, which were 'conducted in people's lounge rooms.' He successfully developed an international organisation, in Hungary and Malaysia to name a few, and continued to do this until a change in his personal circumstances saw him leave this organization and return to Australia.

Here he began to collaborate with others and seeded first the idea and then the reality of EcoSTEPS.

I think the most significant learning and inspiration for me came from the same source, and this was the long term view Julian is taking about EcoSTEPS. He clearly sees that change is coming and he is not only helping to seed this change, he is being changed by it too, as reflected in EcoSTEPS continual commitment to adaptability. Julian and EcoSTEPS express determination, resilience and commitment to the long haul, which I find inspiring.

I also particularly liked the way Julian and his cohorts have shaped an increasingly successful business around their own core values and passions. My

favourite quote was Julian's description of his colleagues as 'corporate refugees'. This appeals to me as I am somewhat of one myself, but also as it gives a type of credibility to the venture as it has at core people who know the workings of organisations, but who are choosing to stand outside of them to help transform them.

It was a pleasure and inspiration to interview Julian and explore EcoSTEPS. I know I am going to hear a lot more of them in the future.