



# Business Lessons from a Radical Industrialist: How a CEO Doubled Earnings , Inspired Employees and Created Innovation from One Simple Idea

By Ray C. Anderson, Robin White

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In 1994, Ray Anderson was 60 years old and at the top of his game as founder and CEO of Atlanta-based Interface, Inc., a modular carpet company that makes those clever carpet tiles that you may have underfoot in your office or coveted via the company's residential brand, FLOR.

That was 17 years ago - before 'green' was the compelling business imperative that it is today (for reference, oil was then \$18/bbl), and frankly, the environment was nowhere on Ray's radar. An Interface associate asked Ray to give a speech to a task force that was forming to answer customer concerns about environmental impacts, and though he had not a clue what he would say, he accepted. As the date for the speech grew closer, he began to sweat -- and then Paul Hawken's book, *The Ecology of Commerce*, landed on his desk. The rest is green business history -- Ray read the book (he's called it a 'spear in the chest' epiphany), his outlook was radically transformed, and he gave a speech that would put the petroleum-dependent carpet company on a path to zero environmental footprint.

What's happened in the intervening years has made Interface the poster child for green business, and Ray's become a bit of an eco rock star. He ditched his gas-guzzling Jaguar in favor of a Prius, built an off-the-grid home, and today, at 76, his life is radically different than what he would have imagined for himself at age 60. This is his story.

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## **Editorial Review**

### **Review**

Sustainability, argues Anderson, makes just as much business sense as it does a liberal crusade, and he even makes absorbing reading out of the process that transformed his operations.

--Publisher's Weekly

He may be 'radical' but he's also a profit-seeking businessman. Ray has found a new path that's good for the planet and *great* for his business. --Andrew Winston, environmental strategist, author of Green Recovery and co-author of Green to Gold

If we had a lot more businessmen like Ray Anderson, the planet would be neither bankrupt or overheated. He is a hero, and this book makes clear why! --Bill McKibben, author of Deep Economy

We are in desperate need of hope, but if hope is to be credible and trustworthy, it has to walk a straight line. No one does this better than Ray Anderson. --Paul Hawken, author of The Ecology of Commerce, Natural Capitalism, and Blessed Unrest

Ray put everything he has built at his company on the line for what he believed and created a model of profitable sustainability and humanity. This tale of how and why is a great story. --Jonathan Lash, President, World Resources Institute

"Inspirational . . . Essential reading for anyone, whether lay, student, or practitioner, interested in business success today and in the environment." *Library Journal (starred review)*

### **From the Author**

#### **From the Prologue:**

My company, Interface, Inc., has just marked an important milestone - 10 years until our target year for Mission Zero, for zero environmental footprint, a goal for which we have set 2020 as our deadline. I'm immensely proud of Interface, and encouraged about our future.

You may be familiar with my story - the epiphany I experienced in 1994 when I read Paul Hawken's book, *The Ecology of Commerce*, seeking inspiration for a speech to a task force that was organizing at Interface to answer customer concerns about the environment. That change of world view led me down a road I had never imagined for myself or my petroleum-intensive company - eventually to get off oil.

Distancing ourselves from the wellhead requires that we re-imagine the antiquated, linear, take-make-waste industrial system of which we are all a part. And instead, to become part of a thoughtful, cooperative, cyclical system that mimics nature in the way that we design, source, manufacture, sell, install - and eventually reclaim and recycle - our products. This ambitious undertaking requires new technology, new inputs, new thinking. It is intensely complicated and, at the same time, completely liberating to think outside the traditional confines of design and manufacturing. Somewhere along the way, the idea that what we were doing was so right - so right, and so smart - emerged to propel us forward.

At Interface, this new way of thinking is working - our products are better than ever, our employees are more engaged than ever, customers are extraordinarily loyal; and, importantly, costs are down, not up, dispelling the myth that sustainability is expensive. That's the story you'll find in more detail in this book.

## About the Author

Ray C. Anderson, founder and chairman, Interface, Inc. (IFSIA)

The story is now legend: the "spear in the chest" epiphany Ray Anderson experienced when he first read Paul Hawken's *The Ecology of Commerce*, seeking inspiration for a speech to an Interface task force on the company's environmental vision. Seventeen years and a sea change later, Ray estimates that Interface is more than half-way towards the vision of "Mission Zero," the journey no one would have imagined for the company or the petroleum-intensive industry of carpet manufacturing which has been forever changed by Ray's vision. Interface is redesigning processes and products, pioneering new technologies, and making efforts to reduce or eliminate waste and harmful emissions while increasing the use of renewable materials and sources of energy. Ray chronicles that journey in a new "how" and "why" to on sustainability, *Business Lessons from a Radical Industrialist*, (St. Martin's Griffin, 2011) the paperback follow-up to the book, *Confessions of a Radical Industrialist*, published by St. Martin's Press in September 2009.

An honors graduate of Georgia Institute of Technology, Ray learned the carpet trade through 14-plus years at various positions in the textiles industry, and in 1973, set about founding a company to produce the first free-lay carpet tiles in America. Today, he chairs the world's largest producer of modular commercial floorcoverings. Interface has diversified and globalized its businesses, with sales in 110 countries and manufacturing facilities on four continents.

## Users Review

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**Homer Smith:**

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### **Morris Reyna:**

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