



Seattle Professional Newsletter

August 2010

Member Spotlight: Erin Burke



Our August Member Spotlight features Erin Burke. She loves traveling and working with communities and is very interested in supply chain management and sustainable sourcing. To contact Erin, send an email to burke.erin@gmail.com

Erin visiting the Inca ruins in the Sacred Valley, outside of Pisac

What do you do and why did you join Net Impact?

I recently finished my International MBA at Schulich in June and returned to the Seattle area where I have been traveling a bit - Glacier National Park, Eugene, Vancouver, BC and San Francisco - reconnecting with friends and networking with organizations in the Northwest. I joined Net Impact when I was working in Portland and trying to implement sustainable initiatives in my work. I enjoyed talking with people of a similar mindset who were considering many of the same questions and were more than willing to offer advice. I ultimately decided on Schulich because a friend in the professional chapter told me about her experience.

What have you caused to change or participated in changing in your workplace?

As a Peace Corps Volunteer in the Dominican Republic I worked with coffee cooperatives in a number of areas, from improving quality and accessing international markets to branding their roasted/packaged coffee and securing low-interest pre-harvest financing. Financing is one of the greatest challenges for coffee farmers. When I arrived, I discovered the co-op had taken out a loan from a middleman at a high interest rate and they had been paying it back for several years. I helped the group renegotiate the loan, organize a payment schedule and secure a low-interest loan with Banco Agrícola (State Agricultural Bank) the following harvest. I also worked with the co-op to promote their coffee internationally and by the second harvest they sold one container of coffee (approximately 34,000 lbs) to a specialty buyer, guaranteeing them a much better price.

After my Peace Corps experience, I worked as a manager for a fine dining Peruvian restaurant in Portland. I led a number of small sustainability initiatives, such as recycling cooking oil and reducing energy usage, but I also helped expand the company's local vendor base, connecting the chefs with farmers and small suppliers who could provide low-cost, quality food. Sustainable sourcing is a passion of mine because I believe purchasing decisions can have a significant impact, both environmentally and socially.

What did you learn in the process that you would like to share?

Sustainable sourcing can be tough! In the restaurant business, time is a scarce resource and management wears many hats, focusing most of their efforts on making the ship run smoothly. So, implementing new strategies can be challenging. The Peruvian restaurant was experiencing significant growth, serving sometimes over 500 patrons nightly. The chefs' priority was providing quality, consistent dishes in a timely manner, ensuring consumer satisfaction. Also, because the restaurant was Peruvian, few dishes could be made "seasonal," apart from the awesome soups and specials, and not many farmers could provide the amount or variety of product when needed. In addition, some of the restaurant's less local, larger vendors had long-term relationships with management that were important to its success.

Luckily Portland benefited from a strong foodie community, with many organizations who were working in this area. I took advantage of events, conferences and tools that could make the process of identifying potential vendors easier and less time consuming for the chefs. Also, to make it more "sellable" and gain the support of management, I looked for suppliers that would provide some kind of advantage, on price, quality and quantity. I think gaining the support of management was key, so I worked with other managers who shared my interest and could lend a hand.

What's next for you?

I just finished my International MBA at Schulich in June, and now I'm back in the Northwest looking to apply some of my supply chain and vendor management experience with an international company.

What do you feel you need to learn or be supported in to do that?

My particular interest within supply chain management is ethical sourcing, which I understand to be very dynamic, from talking to different professionals in the field. I have a lot of experience in Latin America, but have a limited knowledge of doing business in Asia, particularly China. At some point I'd like to take Mandarin classes and learn more about successful vendor compliance models. Also, I think understanding the environmental impact of making products, from manufacturing to disposal, is important. In the near future I'd like to get some hands-on experience doing a Life Cycle Analysis.

Networking Opportunity

Book Club Meeting on Bainbridge Island

Date: Saturday, September 11

Time: 1:00 pm – 3:00 pm

Location: Bainbridge Island

Join us for Seattle Net Impact's next book club get together! We're discussing *The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind* while enjoying a barbecue and drinks. You can find a synopsis and reviews of the book on Google Books. The gathering will be at Erin Burke's place on Bainbridge Island, approximately 5 miles from the ferry. She's happy to pick people up from the boat and can accommodate several in her car. Otherwise, it's also fairly easy to drive on the boat, but quite a bit more expensive (\$14.85 each way). She will provide directions later in the month. Please let her know if you'd like to attend by sending an email to burke.erin@gmail.com. We look forward to it to seeing you all there!

Board Transition in September: Stay Tuned

Sneak peek at some of the faces you'll see on the Board next year...



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About Net Impact

Net Impact Seattle, a Professional Chapter affiliate of the international nonprofit [Net Impact](#), is a network of professionals interested in advancing corporate social responsibility and sustainability. We empower our members to make meaningful change in and through the workplace. Join our effort to help businesses improve communities and the environment. For more information about Net Impact Seattle, visit [Net Impact Seattle's Facebook Page](#).