

Review: *Green at Work: finding a business career that works for the environment.*

By Susan Cohn

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Putnam, Hayes & Bartlett

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Cohn, Susan. *Green at Work: finding a business career that works for the environment*. Washington D.C.: Island Press, 1995. 417 pp. paper US \$17.95 ISBN: 1-55963-334-4. Recycled, acid-free paper.

Anyone who has worked for some time in the environmental field has gotten a call from, say, the nephew of an old friend, fresh out of college and eager to start a career. The job seeker has some notion that they'd like to do something connected to the environment, but only a fuzzy idea of what the profession offers.

These calls have become more frequent in the 1990s as new college graduates consider careers offering more than the material gratification of the 1980s. At the same time, the environmental field became "hot."

Susan Cohn's revised edition of *Green at Work* is aimed squarely at these neophyte green job seekers, those without specialized technical or scientific training. The book is organized by job types (finance, marketing, consulting, public relations, etc.) and consists primarily of people in these fields talking about their jobs. This reliance on first person experiences is both the book's greatest strength and weakness.

The author's approach works because it is difficult to generalize about the field. The book's 70 different profiles cover a fascinating range of jobs, from Green bankers to Green cookbook writers, and is a testament to how environmental concerns have crept into nearly every vocation imaginable. By letting those with the jobs speak for themselves, the reader is left with a full appreciation of the variety in the environmental job market.

Yet the problem with relying upon people's own descriptions of their work is that most people, given such a forum, will a) make their jobs sound more important than they are, and b) discuss their job responsibilities in glowing terms, omitting the parts they don't like.

For example, an employee of the Overseas Private Investment Corporation (OPIC), a federal agency that provides business insurance for overseas investments in "risky" countries, proudly trumpets the opportunities she has had to integrate environmental and development issues. Yet, the environmental review process at OPIC was long considered by some to be a joke, and the battle to incorporate environmental issues into OPIC's insurance decisions has been hard fought. These frustrations never come through in the description.

Similarly, few of the respondents discuss the more mundane aspects of many environmental jobs in the United States; the pouring over of 300 page Federal Register notices, for example. Yet, these are integral parts of working in the environmental field, and new job seekers are better served by understanding them along with the sexier parts of the profession.

Despite these problems, the book stands as one of the best starting points for the general job seeker in the environmental profession. In addition to the first person accounts, the book includes an excellent list of organizations offering non-technical environmental jobs.

Cohn's book should be required reading for new environmental job hunters, particularly before they begin calling for career advice.

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