



choosing a career

Resource

Work Voices #8

Elena Olmedo – Sustainability Specialist

It is helpful to view one segment at a time

Context

Elena Olmedo was raised in a bilingual home, her parents having immigrated to the US from El Salvador. She now works for an energy efficiency firm in Berkeley. She describes her interest in sustainability and how she navigated her way through the range of career options this huge, emerging field offered her – whether in business, law or policy etc.

Elena talks about the [green and sustainable business certificate program at City College of San Francisco](#) and the understanding it provided of environmental issues relevant to business and industry. She then took advantage of all the resources available to her to explore possible career paths. For example she interned at two different companies to gain experience of green marketing practices and environmental policy issues, and attended conferences and lectures and read papers and journals to learn all she could about sustainability issues.

Clearly it is challenging to learn about this varied and confusing field and to decide on a focus; waste reduction, transportation, urban design, or energy conservation etc. Elena explains how important it is to find your path. But she is also clear that there are tremendous opportunities, whether in installation, policy or planning and that the industry is growing and will continue to be new and exciting, and ideal for someone who cares about the environment and sustainability issues.

Preview activities/Introductory questions

Warm up questions

How would you apply the term “green” to your everyday life?

Are there ways you could be greener in your life?

What does sustainability mean to you? Give examples.

What is the connection between green and sustainability?

Vocabulary

Bilingual, energy efficiency, commercial, renewable energy, ecotourism, waste reduction, internship, solar, start-up company, unique, urban design, emissions, greenhouse gas, carbon footprint.

Focus questions

- Where was Elena trained?
- What choices did she face that made it hard for her to choose a career path?

- What did she do to help herself make a decision?
- Why does she feel her work is important?
- Why is she so sure that there will be “tremendous opportunity for anyone in this field”?

Discuss responses.

Post viewing

Research

a Training courses

- Investigate the different fields for employment in sustainability.
- Find training programs in one or two areas in green technology that you could choose.
- Find the information you would need about each program in order to decide to apply for it.

b Job opportunities

- Look for job opportunities in the green and sustainable business field.
- List the range of job options you could pursue – solar energy, waste reduction, energy efficiency whether in installation, policy or planning etc.

*Summarize findings for **a** and **b** in two paragraphs to share and discuss with the class*

Reflection

- Why does Elena recommend this work?
- What are the challenges she faced?
- What kind of personal qualities would work well for this job? List the qualities you would need.
- What personal qualities does she bring?

Write a short reflection paragraph in response to these questions

Contact assignment

Interview someone who works in an area of green technology that interests you.
Record the interview if possible.

Post it to your class blog – if you have one.

Further resources

- Green and Sustainable Business Programs at [City College of San Francisco](#)
Green & Sustainable Business Certificate of Accomplishment
Green and Sustainable Small Business Certificate
Green & Sustainable Travel Certificate of Accomplishment

- Alternative Energy Program information at [Diablo Valley College](#)
- KQED Education ESL [Eco-Literacy Resources](#)