

# TRY EXPLAINING YOUR JOB IN SUSTAINABILITY TO A 5-YEAR-OLD

“Daddy, what do you do at work?” This innocent question hides a parent’s challenge of explaining to their child the importance of engagement and dialogue for a sustainable future.



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Our journey from home to school is always a time for important questions and explanations with my five-year-old daughter. Today, the topic of discussion is what I do for a living.

Every parent should have an answer to this question prepared because sooner or later the time will come when our children will ask us about all the time we spend “at work” during the day.

Some are lucky enough to have a job that is easy to explain to children with limited experience of the world. “I cure people”; “I put out fires”; “I build houses”. Those of us who deal with sustainability and stakeholder engagement have their work cut out.

But now the question has been asked and demands an answer. I certainly can’t begin with “I help facilitate dialogue with and between different categories of stakeholders to allow companies to set up an effective and relevant approach to sustainability...”.



Dialogue and collaboration are founding pillars of a sustainable society.

No, I would have surely lost my daughter’s attention at the word “stakeholder” in favour of a funny-shaped puddle. So, let’s try this:

“Do you remember what happened at the park yesterday when you were bored because you wanted to play tag but had no one to play with?” She looks at me. She probably doesn’t understand what this has to do with her question, but she nods and keeps listening.

"You went to the other children to say that you wanted to play tag, but they all said 'no' because one wanted to play with the ball, another wanted to go on a swing, and yet another wanted to play with superhero figurines.

"It was an unpleasant situation: no one wanted to play the other's game. The afternoon looked like it was going to be very boring.

"So I came with you to talk to them again, but this time we asked what their favourite games were.

"In the end, we discovered that everyone, like you, likes to play hide and seek.

"What a great idea! Nobody had thought about it, and now a boring afternoon turned into fun and games."

She still doesn't understand, but she smiles when she thinks back to that beautiful afternoon.

Finally, I get to the point.

"Well, that's basically what I do at work, you know?"



**Only by knowing the expectations of others can we work as a team and achieve better results than we would have achieved by working alone.**

"Even we adults often work and only think about what we have to do and what we need without concern for others.

"If you work without knowing what the people next to us or in the nearby offices would like, you run the risk of doing a really bad job, of 'getting bored' as you would have in the park.

"So, at work, I talk to a lot of different people, find out what they want and, in the end, bring them together so that everyone knows what other people need. If you only knew how many astonished faces I see when people discover new things they did not even imagine.

"With that common understanding, you can always find something that brings everyone together, so you can finally work as a group and achieve much better results than you would have achieved on your own.

"Well, when I go to work, I do this. Do you understand now?" I conclude, fully satisfied with the way I explained it, convinced that I had hit the nail on the head.

After a few seconds of silence, she looks up and says:

"Dad, so you play hide-and-seek in the office?"

"Yes, darling, but they always find me..."

Well, better luck next time.