



# Sustainability in Action: Analyzing the Practices of SustainLA

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## Executive Summary

### Assessing SustainLA's sustainability practices as an event related business and customer motivation.

## Alternatives

Finding alternatives to being sustainable is unique and is different in every situation. Although we have a dictionary definition of what sustainability is, the purpose is to reduce waste in the long run. We want to reduce what goes into our landfills and especially reduce what stays there for years and years to come. Another definition of sustainability is using what you have rather than purchasing more than what you need. SustainLA is unique because while being an event related company, they also have a refill station shop. This is where you can find items from lip balm to dish soap and refill your already owned containers. Their event rental company includes glassware, dinnerware, vintage tableware, flatware, linens, and so much more! Instead of purchasing these items for one use for one event, you can rent through SustainLA and reduce your carbon footprint. My focus is the practices SustainLA brings to the table as a company that highlights the importance of sustainability and reducing our carbon footprint. Here are just a few things that they do as a company that contribute to their positive social, economic, and environmental impact.



4 Spigot Water Bar  
"The Zero Waste Alternative to Bottled Water"



Rentals:  
Glassware  
Dinnerware  
Vintage Tableware  
Flatware  
Linens



Additional Rentals:  
Beverage Dispensers  
Coffee Service  
Display and Decorations

Leslie was able to work and find something that her community was longing for, a sustainable event rental company. Although Leslie would like to work to have her own event space where sustainability is encouraged and focused on, she will continue with her event rental company as her customers and community encourage and support her business. Her "Zero Waste Space" is her big picture, "where folks can come, and we make it easy and affordable to have reusable." Leslie encourages and fosters a safe space where people can come in and be comfortable to ask questions or get started in their zero-waste lifestyle. She would like to provide them a space where she can "provide solutions without expectations or shame." Some additional services that SustainLA provides included Zero-Waste Consultations and Post-Event Clean Ups. These are alternatives they provide that still contribute to the overall execution of your event, or just how you leave the environment.

# sustain LA

ZERO WASTE LIVING + EVENTS



## Motivations

Leslie's mission was to improve the sustainability practices of the restaurant she worked for by overhauling how it handled food, water, and material waste. Despite the challenges, she increased efficiency and introduced more sustainable materials, which was well-received by the community and became a testament to her passion for the planet. This passion led her to work on larger-scale events, including a music festival in Silver Lakes with over 20,000 attendees. Her focus was on waste management, ensuring the event used sustainable materials and featured eco-friendly waste bins. She implemented a three-bin system to educate the public on recycling, composting, and waste disposal, with workers monitoring the bins to ensure correct usage. This system helped people make more informed decisions about waste. As an event planner, Leslie also understood the importance of preparing for challenges and, equally, what to do when overprepared. She recognized that sustainability must be prioritized from the early planning stages and considered the environmental impact of events. Being in LA, where the effects on the oceans are highly visible, Leslie was motivated to create zero-waste events. She partnered with event organizers to set up "zero waste stations" and "eco-stations," offering attendees places to refill water bottles, sort waste properly, and learn about sustainability. These initiatives reached a large audience, educating and inspiring others to make a difference. Through these efforts, Leslie demonstrated how event planners can control waste by managing materials brought into an event space and ensuring that recycling and disposal are properly handled. Leslie's passion reached a large audience, this included who came into her brick-and-mortar spot, or her event rental company. Although most people are more familiar with SustainLA's refill shop, there are some testaments to her event rental company, such as this customer that had an amazing experience with Leslie's team for a wedding!

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We have always loved Sustain LA's environmentally friendly small business, extremely organized (and cute) shop, personable employees, and how great all of their detergents are! When it came time for our wedding, we noticed on their easy to navigate website that they had a wide variety of rental equipment that was exactly what we were looking for our wedding! We filled out what we wanted on their website and then were put in contact with Jessica who was extremely professional and helpful over email! She even let us come into the store so we could look over all of our options before we made our official selections! When it came time for the wedding, Sustain LA truly delivered and made it such a smooth process! Overall, Sustain LA was worth every penny when it came to rentals and you should totally use them for your wedding!

## Conclusion

Being able to interview Leslie from SustainLA opened my eyes to a world of possibilities, she reminded me that you do not need to fit all your waste in a mason jar to start your sustainability journey. That does not define what zero waste looks like. SustainLA shows an amazing example of what events can look like while still being sustainable for the environment. While it is not easy, SustainLA provides amazing alternatives to single use plastics, styrofoam, and an excess amount of waste. Sustainability is about working with what you have, and we are taught as event planners to make it work however you need to. Leslie stated that customers seek out their company in hopes of contributing to the sustainability movement. They seek out SustainLA because of their knowledge of how they can leave a lasting mark of putting on events that will not harm the community they are in. Being socially aware and understanding the community you're a part of is crucial; you cannot introduce an idea to a community that is not open to it or that is not *need* of it, it will not be successful if the resources already exist. You must be able to work with what is around, and build from it, even work together if you would like to expand the idea. That is the wonderful thing about event planning, you must be flexible with your resources, *especially* if you are going to be working with zero-waste and sustainable elements. Sustainability is never going to be an exact science that impacts everybody the same. But what we can agree on is how we as a collective can decide to make these changes in our lives, and in our careers, to do better for the future. Although we play a part, it is also the responsibility of manufacturers and producers to do their part in eliminating products that are not necessary. We need to make people care, care about the environment, care about the efforts of climate activists, care about the destruction that comes from excessive landfill. Leslie puts it best by saying, "I think people care, the problem is that it is difficult and expensive to do the right thing. And not because of the individual, but because of what is subsidized and because of legislation. There is no mandate for a company to make multiples things for the products they produce." She first felt it was her responsibility to educate, but now feels that it is different, that her responsibility is to provide an inclusive and safe space to do the hard work on the back end of events.

## Abstract

### What does sustainability mean?

Sustainability, in terms of hospitality, refers to the efforts put forth by hospitality companies and businesses to reduce their environmental impact, promote social responsibility, and ensure economic development for the long term. Sustainable hospitality companies are doing their part to ensure future generations could grow their own businesses and continue their practices.

### SustainLA

SustainLA is a company founded in 2009 by Leslie VanKeuren Campbell, an advocate for change in the hospitality industry. Leslie's twenty years of experience in the restaurant industry revealed to her the disconnect between sustainable practices and how we run businesses. Her passion led the success of SustainLA's mission of [Changing the] human behavior of consumption so we can restore the natural balance of the planet." During her experience in the restaurant industry, she noticed one material that she found everywhere that was terrible for sustainable practices: Styrofoam. Styrofoam is a petroleum-based plastic that is non-biodegradable and is extremely harmful to the environment and human health. Her experience in this restaurant led her to want to do better, focusing on prioritizing better materials, and she did that. With the complete overhaul in the restaurant's operations, she was able to improve overall turnover rates, water efficiency, and waste reduction. The community received this very well and sparked her continued passion to do better for the environment, but she wanted, and *needed*, to do this on a larger scale.

## Why Sustainable Events?

There are many reasons why promoting more sustainable events are important to our future, but also the future of the hospitality industry. Sustainable events can reduce waste and lower your carbon footprint, but they can also do better for the business in the long run by enhancing the brand image and being more cost efficient. Whether on a large or small scale, events produce approximately 15-20% of food waste. To put that into perspective, let's take an event turnout of 500 guests. Each guest throughout the event will consume about 1lb of food, coming out to a total of 500lbs of food for **one** event. 500lbs of food multiplied by .15 or 15%, is approximately 75 lbs. of food waste! 500 attendees is no where in comparison to the scale of events that occur now; raves, musical festivals, even food related events are not dwindling anytime soon, therefore NOW is the time to change and find alternatives to how we go about sustainability in events. According to research conducted by MeetGreen, A 1000-person, three-day event translates below:

Now, this is just one element of an event. While food is a huge factor, there are so many more elements that can make events very harmful to the environment. According to Climate Trade (2023), "the event industry contributes about 10% of global CO2 emissions, this figure is equivalent to the entire yearly emissions of the United States." This includes, 70-90% of emissions from travel to and from the event, food production contributing to about 30% of global greenhouse emissions, energy consumption totaling about 4% for the event, and not to mention when attendees do overnight stays at hotel, a huge contributor to higher carbon footprints. Looking at the facts, numbers, and overall statistics for event production



can be extremely overwhelming. Doing this research, it made me wonder if it is worth putting on events at such a large scale. Why go through all this just to increase the numbers of waste, emissions, and our overall carbon footprint? Alternatives. There are so many ways that we can encourage sustainable practices at any scale! Although it is hard work, takes lots of research, and lots of time spent in the planning stages, it is so worth the pay off, happy attendees and happy environment.

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