

Looking for a more Sustainable Christmas? SWM is here to help!

In the run-up to Christmas this year, I have been following the excellent posts from sustainability Coach and mentor - [Jen Gale](#) founder of *Sustainable(ish)*. Throughout December she has been posting an A-Z list of tips for a 'Crap free Christmas', a few of which I'd like to share with you for future reference. Well worth following [her adventures and podcasts](#) on LinkedIn!

During one of the posts, she mentions the 'Elf on the Shelf' trend (dreaded by many parents!), *'the thought of making up 'hilarious' pranks for him to have got up to makes me want to poke my eyes with a fork.'*

But she also goes on to suggest – *'HOWEVER, if you do want to do the elf, could he/she make little eco suggestions for your little darlings instead?'*. It occurred to me that you could do a 'workplace' version to get tips across to your colleagues in a fun manner to get engagement and (subtly) raise awareness (which is better than the relentless 'manic street preachers of sustainability' approach, which tends to fall on deaf ears after a while!)

So with that in mind, I've taken on the mantle of 'The Naughty Elf' and chosen a few for you to consider for your next festive engagement with your colleagues / employees / stressed parents!



Andy Whyte - Naughty Elf

A is for Advent activities

- Lots of **foodbanks** are running campaigns encouraging people to add an item to an advent box each day that can then be dropped off at the foodbank and delivered to families who are struggling
- **Random Acts of Kindness** calendar: Include a random act of kindness for each day - things like 'donate to the foodbank', send a Christmas card to the local nursing home, bake some biscuits for a friend

B is for Buying

- Buy less: Could you do Secret Santas for the workplace? It can come with financial and resource rules – SWM had a great 'less than £5 and not new' rule this year!
- Buy second-hand / reconditioned / remanufactured: There are many sites offering guaranteed products that have been remanufactured for reuse. Check out sites like Music Magpie, eBay, (for electricals and tech) [Vinted](#) (for clothes) and Sustain (for office furniture), and many more - you'll be amazed what you can find - and it will save you £££!
- Buy local: Support local independent shops - our High Streets need all the help they can get, and shop owners will genuinely do a happy dance when you buy from them.
- Buy ethically: Checkout [#EthicalHour](#) for their [#ShopEthicalInstead](#) campaign for some amazing gift guides of lovely things, all curated from independent ethical small brands. A personal favourite of mine is [Cycle of Good](#), who do amazing gifts by recycling inner tubes, HGV Lorry curtains and other materials into belts, bags and other handy items!

C is for Christmas jumpers

- 🌐 These are the fastest of fast fashion - made cheaply, to be used only a handful of times and then discarded. So what are the alternatives? Thankfully we don't have to ditch the Christmas jumper completely –
- 🌐 SWAP - Could you organise a Christmas jumper swap in your workplace? - Final Straw Foundation have loads of [brilliant resources](#) on their website to help you do exactly this, including template letters to use.
- 🌐 SHOP SECONDHAND - Can you find a 'new to you' Christmas jumper second-hand? The charity shops have already got their Christmas stock out on display, or check out Vinted, eBay, Depop or Oxfam Online Shop for online finds!

E for Experience Gifts: The beauty of these is there's no 'stuff' to clutter up your house, and hopefully very little associated waste that comes with it! AND you get to spend time with your loved ones (if you choose an experience you can do together), which is kind of what Christmas is supposed to be all about, right..?!!



F for Footprint (Carbon)

- 🌐 Fairy Lights - With energy bills rising all the time, plugging in extra things might not feel like a great thing to do! Do reduce the impact (and cost) of your festive sparkle:
 - Make sure your lights are LED or halogen
 - Use a timer or smart plug to turn them off at night and when you're out
 - If you've got any that are broken, see if you can fix them. If not, make sure you take them to the WEEE recycling at the recycling centre.
- 🌐 [Furoshiki](#): The ancient Japanese art of wrapping presents in re-usable fabric! It's actually super easy and nowhere near as complicated as it looks - it's speeded up my wrapping hugely, and no sellotape needed!

R is for all the 'R's' on the (festive) waste hierarchy!

- 🌐 Rethink: What do you want Christmas to be about? What memories do you want to create? What are the things that you value and how can you start to bring more of those values into your Christmas?
- 🌐 Refuse: 'Refuse' sounds a bit mean, doesn't it? Especially at this time of year. But how about 'refusing' to be manipulated by the commercialisation of Christmas, the clever ads, the societal pressure that more is better? Working out what you want Christmas to mean to you and your friends, family and colleagues, and doing your best to stick to your guns!
- 🌐 Reduce: Buy less, buy better - see 'B'! Quality over Quantity.
- 🌐 REUSE: Reusable fabric wrapping - see 'F' for *furoshiki* - Reuse your decorations and your Christmas jumper year after year - And find out your nearest local Zero Waste refill shop, where you can buy some of your festive ingredients packaging free and 'reuse' your containers.
- 🌐 REHOME: Pass on anything you no longer want or need via eBay, Vinted, FB marketplace, Olio, Freegle and, of course, your local charity shops. If you get pressies that aren't really your cup of tea, please do pass on rather than landfill!

- REPAIR: Channel your inner 'Repair Shop' expert (you absolutely don't need to be an expert!) and have a go at repairing those broken fairy lights, that Christmas jumper with the hole, or the special festive plate with the crack in it!
- RECYCLE:
 - Double check what your local authority will take kerbside and at the recycling centre.
 - Some will have Christmas tree recycling collections in the New Year.
 - Some won't take any wrapping paper or cards (but there might be card recycling collection points at your local supermarket). Remember - you can't recycle anything with glitter on it!
- ROT: Use your local authority food waste collection scheme if you have one. If not, then consider asking Father Christmas for a hot composter so you can compost your food waste come the New Year!

W is for Wrapping paper.

- Avoid metallic wrapping paper, or paper with glitter on -- Neither of these can be recycled
- Do the 'Scrunch Test' to see if your paper is paper or has plastic content: Scrunch a ball of wrapping paper into a ball - if it stays in a ball, it's okay to recycle (as long as there's no glitter!) - if it unfurls, it's got plastic in it and can't be recycled
- Try and remove as much sellotape as you can (or use paper tape!)
- Embrace your inner 'Eco Elf' and squirrel away any big bits to smooth out and save to use again! Double check with your local authority whether they will accept wrapping paper (some have a blanket ban)
- Try out some re-usable wrapping paper - take a look at [Wrag Wrap](#) - Or have a go at *furoshiki* (see 'F')



And Z is for Zoom, Zero waste(ish), and Zzzzz

- ZOOM (and others!): Although it's always lovely to see people in person at Christmas, if you've got far flung family and relations, could you all get together on Zoom (other platforms are available - they just don't begin with a 'Z'..!) and then make time for a trip at another time of year when you might be able to have a longer trip and spend more time together?
- ZERO WASTE(ISH): Zero waste' is a tall ask at any time of year, and especially at Christmas. But we can all be 'zero waste(ish)' - more mindful of the waste we're producing and taking some first (or subsequent) steps to reduce it. See 'W' for waste and 'R' for a rundown of the waste hierarchy (more fun than it sounds..!)

And Finally - ZZZ ZZZ! Remember - It's important to take some time for your own mental health and wellbeing too! Set aside some time for friends and family where you aren't running around at 100mph ensuring everyone has a topped-up drink and mince pie! Spend time remembering the good things you've achieved over the last year. Remember to relax, recharge and revitalise for an exciting, challenging and sustainable new year!

--- *Andy Whyte, SWM*