



Easy Ways to Become a Socially Responsible Consumer

Everything we buy has a social, economic or environmental impact, positive or negative.

Your choices matter. When you consider the ethical value of your shopping, you will ultimately make the world a better place for yourself and everyone else.

Whilst low-priced garments and items may prove alluring for many cost-conscious consumers, there has been a growing movement among many to be more mindful in their buying habits.

More and more people are looking for more socially responsible, more ethical products.

Today's exercise will get you thinking about ways that you can become a more socially responsible consumer.

Step 1: Get Educated. As a consumer of a product, you want to find out more information about that product. Research about the more about companies and their practices.

Ask the company to tell you about their supply chain. Also ask your family and friends to do the same, as that will provide more information. Companies are willing to answer the questions when consumers ask them. The issue is that most consumers don't ask the tough questions.

Step 2: Hold Companies Accountable. As a socially responsible consumer it's your role to go beyond the information on tags and ask retailers and brands to disclose where products are made, including details on factories and subcontractors.

As well as making inquiries in stores, utilise public forums to ask questions about company practices. The most effective is to start tweeting your questions on Facebook or circulating them amongst friends on using social media. If you're shopping at big chains, check their website for a corporate responsibility page.

Step 3: Shop Locally. Finding out where all the components of an item came from can often be tricky, especially when you're shopping in really big stores. Whilst the label will tell you the country that manufactured the item, don't assume that all components came from that country.

For ease of mind, shop at some of the small local shops that you have available to you, and that can really give you a far better sense of how those products were made.

Step 4: Purchase Second-hand or Be Prepared to Spend More. When you purchase recycled clothes, you're helping the environment by doing so and it can actually save you quite a bit of money.

For those who would prefer not to go to thrift shops, consider purchasing fewer items of higher quality from companies you're confident in. Change the way you think about shopping, you're investing in quality because you know it's going to last, a few years rather than just a few months.

Know that the high-quality items that come from environments where you're very confident that workers are treated well and that they're being paid a fair wage – sometimes those items will cost more.

Step 5: Before You Purchase. Consider how you are disposing of your old possessions and how you will dispose of this new purchase in the future. Look at the number of recycling options available.

Dispose of all items responsibly. Check to see if they contain hazardous material, if so utilise the appropriate disposal areas.

Reflective Exercise

Act with your wallet. Buy responsibly; recycle and re-use; buy second hand; save money.

Look at all of the items that you purchase last week. Follow the five steps to find out if you have been a socially responsible consumer.

If not, what measures will you take so you can become a socially responsible consumer?

Here are some easy to implement ideas:

- **Food:** Look for fair trade brands. You'll be surprised at how affordable prices are. The Fairtrade certification ensures sustainable livelihoods for producers and workers in developing countries, by negotiating better trading conditions. Visit <https://www.fairtrade.net/about-fairtrade/fairtrade-and-you/fairtrade-near-you.html> to see where you can purchase fair trade products near you.
- **Fresh Food:** When buying fresh ingredients, try sticking to seasonal ones. This ensures your food has been produced within reasonable distance and offers the best possible nutritional value.
- **Compost:** Consider composting your food waste, if you have even a small garden or backyard. It's the ultimate saving tip: every single bit of food is used ... and then re-used!
- **Consider the materials used:** Before you actually buy the product, have you considered the impact it will have during and after its use? Is it a one-off product? Do you need it? Is the packaging/container re-usable, recyclable, or is

it hard to decompose and recycle? These factors should come into play when you are considering buying or even getting the item for free. For this reason, plastic bottles, styrofoam and other non-biodegradable materials should be sparsely purchased, or never, if possible.

- **Consider the impact of the product:** Consider the product from a consumer standpoint, and the attitude it generates in society. is the product actually needed? Or is it just another whim that the market demands, but we don't actually need? Going by the saying, "if you don't need it, don't get it" is a good way to go. Needing and wanting are two different things altogether. A consumerist lifestyle not only pollutes, but also contributes to your general decline in a standard of living, as one-use items tend to be lower in quality. Buying more and more of these one-time use items with short product life cycles only drains your finances and overflows our landfills.