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# 'A Funny Thing Happens When You Follow Your Passion'

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*In April, Knowledge@Wharton High School met Alice Beittel, a senior at Bishop O'Dowd High School in Oakland, Calif. In honor of [Earth Day](#), Beittel shared her thoughts about corporate social responsibility and why she feels businesses are “morally responsible to replenish and sustain the sources that provide foundations for their economic success.”*

*Beittel is back with us. In this first-person essay, the now college student — who just started her freshman year at the University of California, Davis — reflects on how following her passion in high school quite literally changed the course of her life.*

*Beittel's essay also helps KWHS introduce a new partnership with the organization Turning Green and its Project Green Challenge, a global call to action for high school and college students that is comprised of 30 sustainability-themed challenges in 30 days throughout the month of October. Our two organizations are collaborating on ways that help students better understand and embrace the economics of sustainability. Visit [Project Green Challenge](#) to learn all the details about this year's competition, which starts October 1, 2015.*

*Here, in an edited version of a blog that she wrote for Turning Green, Beittel recalls discovering Project Green Challenge in 2013, during her junior year of high school. It undoubtedly had an impact: Beittel is now working toward an environmental science and management degree.*

In 2013...I found myself in violation of the earth's well being in the food I ate, the clothing I wore and the products I put in, on and around my body. Throughout the month of October, I became immersed with how to truly live a sustainable lifestyle, to understand the impacts of things like plastic microbeads invading our oceans, toxic e-waste disposal in developing countries, the devastating effects of industrial farming on our soil, and on and on.

A passion I never knew existed propelled me through the month to do everything possible to spread awareness and mobilize change. My team and I made presentations to faculty and staff, at club gatherings, we sent out school-wide videos, called government officials and made so many posters that our markers ran out of ink. Amidst the excitement, my thinking began to shift. It shifted from looking at a jug of milk as...well...a jug of milk to its impacts – fracking, contaminated water, plastics in oceans and cows pumped with antibiotics and growth hormones. It was not the image of a world that was intentional and thoughtful about people and planet.

A funny thing happens when you follow your passion. As soon as I started reaching out to students, faculty and staff, I found many people who believed in a more sustainable future for our school, our world and our planet. Early junior year, a group of friends and I talked about how amazing it would be to have solar panels that doubled as sun protectors on our boiling-hot classroom building. Today, what we deemed as a far-fetched idea, is a reality. Who knew that a small group of students with a daydream could be the final push for a more sustainable campus? Looking back, so many people had a hand in the project. It underscores the existence of a massive force of positive change that is assembling across the globe. We see it grow every year during Project Green Challenge amongst my high school and college peers around the world.

This world needs a paradigm shift, and that will only happen if the people who live on its soil realize that we are the force for change. If you are passionate about design, math, teaching, art, science, public health, engineering, medicine, history, theater, literature, religion, international relations, or literally anything else, you are the drivers of the future, and the time is now to speak up for justice.

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Author Alice Walker puts it simply: “Activism is my rent for living on this planet.” This planet is our home. As young people, we need to raise our voices far and wide. Let’s “dream and do” like never before. It’s up to us!