

The journey to being a better corporation

BY LEIGHA DICKENS
 "We envision a global community that uses business as a force for good."

That is the opening line of the B Corporation declaration, a document that business leaders sign as part of a final step to transfer their company's incorporated status from that of a standard for-profit company into a B Corporation®, or B Corp™.

B Corporations represent the evolution of capitalism, a recognition that for-profit companies can, and should, use their enterprises to drive positive change across the globe. Administered by the non-profit B Labs®, earning B Corp certification for a company is a lot like getting a green building certification of a home. Points are awarded for complying with corporate best practices in the categories of social and environmental performance, public transparency and legal accountability. Just like many green building certifications, a company must earn enough total points to achieve certification.

Here at Deltec Homes, we recently undertook the journey to becoming an official B Corp: a move that we thought would be good for us, good for our clients, and good for many businesses in the area as well.

A great fit for green building

The built environment comprises a huge component of our daily lives. The green-building industry should be a natural place for B Corporations, as many green building practices have social and environmental aims. From the perspective of a customer who wants to build a green home, a B Corp offers a great way to ensure that the company values reflect your values. Some of the practices that are recognized by B Corp certification:

- Providing a living wage for all employees, ensuring that your green home is built by people who are likewise invested in, and can equally afford, to stay in this community.

- Environmental sustainability on a deep level. Products that reduce waste, are made of materials sourced from other suppliers who have programs for sustainability, that do not contain harmful chemicals, and that exceed industry standards for energy efficiency.

- Partnering with local nonprofits and advocacy groups to educate and influence state-level policies supporting green building and energy efficiency in the built environment. In our case, we have partnered with great organizations like the WNC Green Building Council and the North Carolina Building Performance Association.

How it helped us

Sustainability has been a priority for our company since the beginning, so some parts of our B Corp certification process were simple. We had already been producing our panelized home product with 100 percent renewable energy and monitoring our process for waste reduction – with more than 78 percent of excess material diverted from the landfill. Other parts of the certification process forced us to push deeper, a great thing for our growth.

- Better documentation. Since setting out to achieve B Corp Certification, we've realized the importance of documenting some of the sustainability policies that as a small business, we had been doing but not thoroughly tracking. For example, how many of our clients exceeded our energy-efficiency goals, and by what amount? What percentage got adequate consulting on indoor air quality? This has helped us see patterns in



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The Deltec manufacturing process exemplifies B Corps goals for responsible business. Deltec Homes photo

Learn More

The B Corp movement is growing, and there are numerous ways to take part locally:

- Online at www.bcorporation.net
- Mountain Bizworks has partnered with local B Corps to host educational events for the community. On June 21, 2016, a B Corp Hack-A-Thon was held where interested parties could come ask questions and meet with B Labs representatives. www.mountainbizworks.org/business-planning-start-ups-entrepreneur-classes-coaching/bcorps/
- B Corp Meetup Group: www.meetup.com/BtheChangeAsheville/

our projects, maintain knowledge and push for even greater improvements.

- Increased transparency and dialogue with employees. We needed our employees to have a better understanding of where our company stood, and how their efforts were helping move the company forward. Like all companies, we want our employees to stay invested, so we created new programs to give all employees a chance to generate ideas for the company and participate in the process of bringing those ideas to fruition.

It has already been clear that this designation has helped us build value with our clients. Although we already offer a unique product, certification gives clients another compelling reason to spring for us over someone else who may be less expensive, but who also offers less. Being a B Corp also lets us into a wide community of other B Corps of all sizes (such as New Belgium and Patagonia), bringing their missions to their work in their own unique ways, with whom we can share ideas and learn ways to keep improving.

Lastly, B Corp Certification gives us a motivation to keep asking deeper questions of ourselves. Are we continuing to live up to our sustainability mission, and how can we use all of our (now well documented) policies and metrics to keep doing better? How do our employees' needs change? How does our business and our product affect our community in ways that we hadn't even thought of before? Once you build the habit of thinking along these newer lines, you can see things you've never noticed before.

Leigha Dickens is Green Building and Sustainability Manager for Deltec Homes, a manufacturer of hurricane-resistant, energy-efficient and net-zero homes for more than 45 years. Leigha helped usher Deltec through the B Corp certification process. She is a RESNET HERS Rater and graduate of UNC-Asheville with a degree in physics.



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