

Communicating Climate Change through Storytelling



Young Leaders' Summit on Northern Climate Change

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The Pembina Institute

“To advance sustainable energy through research, education, consulting and advocacy.”

- Founded in Alberta in 1985
- Focus on energy & environment issues
 - policy research and analysis
 - public interest advocacy and action
 - corporate environmental analysis and consulting
 - public / school education
- A leading Canadian NGO on oil sands and climate change

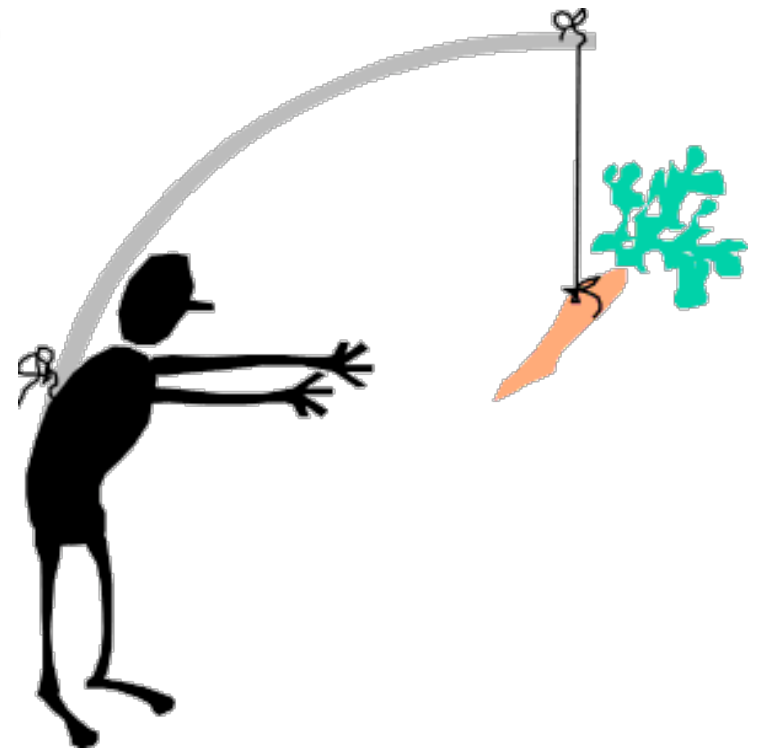
+ What we will do tonight...

- Talk about:
 - Framing
 - Obstacles to communicating climate change and how to resolve them
 - The power of storytelling
- Write out our own personal story
- Share our stories in small groups and provide feedback
- Wrap up discussion



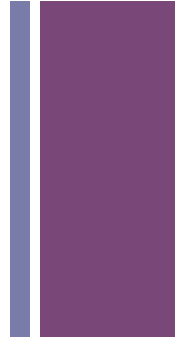
+ Want to motivate others? Start with framing the debate.

- A frame packages words in such a way as to encourage certain interpretations and to discourage other.
- e.g., tax cuts as tax relief vs. taxes as social responsibility





An example of the power of framing



- Imagine that the U.S. is preparing for the outbreak of an unusual Asian disease, which is expected to kill 600 people. Two alternative programs to combat the disease have been proposed.
- Assume that the exact scientific estimates of the consequences of the programs are as, follows:
 - If Program A is adopted, 200 people will be saved.
 - If Program B is adopted, there is a one-third probability that 600 people will be saved and a two thirds probability that no people will be saved.
- Which of the two programs would you favour?

+ Example #2



+ Framing is...

- *“The way a story is told – its selective use of particular values, symbols, metaphors, and messengers – which, in turn, triggers the shared and durable cultural models that people use to make sense of their world.”*

- Susan Nall Bales

+ What's the point?

- Framing is an important way to motivate people to take action or become engaged on climate change
- Framing can help influence climate policy and action.



+ Obstacles in talking about climate change

- **TERRANIUM PROBLEM**—people who view the world as an environment consisting of plants and animals that needs protecting, not a broader system of which we are part
- **LONG LIST of IMPACTS**—people become overwhelmed/paralyzed – to avoid fear, dismiss the problem



+ Obstacles in talking about climate change

- **THE WEATHER PROBLEM**
- **THE WARMING PROBLEM** – narrow definition of what is really happening
- **CHARISMATIC CRITTERS AND PRIORITY PLACES**



+ Obstacles in talking about climate change

- **“LEADERS ARE TAKING CARE OF IT”**
- **“TECHNOLOGY WILL SAVE US”**

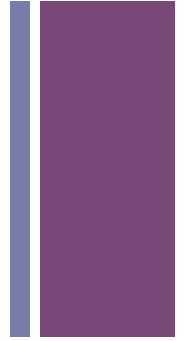


+ Obstacles in talking about climate change

- **THE PERFECTION PROBLEM –**
criticize current solutions as not being good enough thereby delaying action and staying stuck in the status quo



+ Words matter



- Global warming vs. climate change
- Both imperfect but global warming more motivating
- Climate change
 - Not well understood
 - Does not convey speed or urgency
 - Not convey a human-caused problem

Put simply: what we want to convey is: “humans are putting too much carbon in the air”

+ Words matter – example



- Renewable energy...
 - = clean energy
 - = energy that never runs out
 - = green energy

+ Storytelling for change

- “Stories connect us with our humanness and link past, present, and future by teaching us to anticipate the possible consequences of our actions.”
- Stories are impactful because:
 - Evoke emotions
 - Allow us to step into others lives
 - They build trust
 - They paint a picture as to what could be



+ 8 Laws of Storytelling

1. Story is about people
2. People have to want something
3. Stories need to be fixed in time and space
4. Let characters speak for themselves
5. Stories show they don't tell
6. Stories speak the audience's language
7. Stories have one moment of truth – some kind of lesson
8. Stories stir up emotions



+ Elements of a story

To prepare your story, work on including the following elements:

- Characters – who? A hero or a villain? What role do you play?
- Problem – what is your key issue (climate change and tar sands, or climate change and impacts on caribou)
- Space and Time – where and when
- Conflicts – what conflicts do you or your characters face?
- Climax or Crux – turning point or key moment when choice needs to be made
- Solution or Call to Action! – what you are going to do and what do you need us to do

+ Summary on using story telling to convey climate change...

- Gives opportunity to reframe debate
- The truth alone will not set you free – stats and numbers are contestable, emotions and feelings are not.
- But... don't abandon all the facts!
- Speak from your values – drop the language of science nerds.
- Don't use opponents' frames!

Task: write a 2 minute story
about how you came to be
concerned about climate
change.

15 -20 minutes of quiet time.

Optional story template
available.

+ Reflections – how can you use your story to communicate climate change...

