

### How One Book Can Save the World

You've probably been hearing the terms "greenhouse gas" and "global warming" a lot lately, in school or on the news. A "greenhouse gas" is a substance that, when in the atmosphere, allows sunlight to pass through but traps heat, warming the planet. The most infamous greenhouse gas is carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>), which has been released in copious amounts since the dawn of the Industrial Age in the late 1800s from the burning of fossil fuels and has been gradually heating the Earth in the phenomenon referred to as "global warming." We've only just begun to understand the occurrence of this event and what its environmental consequences are in the past few decades, but there's been a huge environmentalist movement to prevent further warming by switching to emission-free, or "clean," energy such as solar and wind power. Unfortunately, despite their efforts, these activists have seen little success because many people still don't believe in or don't care about human-caused climate change. To educate the people and encourage change toward a more planet-friendly society, I am proposing a new two-part strategy for environmentalists to use. It involves a combination of tactics encouraged by multiple authors who've written about activism and/or are activists themselves, which I will discuss shortly. First, a book that includes the facts on climate change and truly puts things into perspective should be published, then once enough people have read it, nonviolent marches to convince the government to switch to renewable energy can be performed.

\_\_\_\_\_ In order to speak about strategies to get disbelievers of climate change to switch their positions, we must first answer the question of why global warming is important. You yourself may still be unsure of the impacts of this event, or if you do understand the issue, may wonder why people continue to need convincing. A good example of what global warming can do is

provided by environmentalist and author Bill McKibben, founder of the program 350, which is fighting against the fossil fuel companies releasing much of the carbon emissions. In his video “Do the Math,” he mentions that, due to the 1°C rise we’ve already gone through, the polar ice caps are melting at an astounding rate. McKibben sadly tells his audience that “We’ve taken one of the largest physical features on Earth and broken it” (“Do the Math” 11:05). This is certainly a terrifying statement, and the poles melting will have several ramifications: sea levels will rise and flood coastal cities, polar ecosystems will be lost, and much more. It is then revealed that “[2°C] is how much the world has said it would be safe to warm” (“Do the Math” 11:22). There is much scientific evidence that increasing atmospheric temperatures are related to the ever-rising amount of CO<sub>2</sub>, and at the rate of CO<sub>2</sub> we’re emitting, it would only take 15 years to reach the stated temperature limit. The scientific community understands the issue well; the problem is, mega-companies are brainwashing regular folks and politicians, trying to hide the truth because they’ll lose money in the switch to renewable energy. Ironically, one of the biggest arguments that they have the public believe in is that global warming is a hoax created by scientists and renewable energy experts *for profit*. The companies are attempting to destroy trust in the scientific community by claiming researchers are scaring people away from fossil fuels for what is truly the sole reason for these mega-companies to encourage their use: money. Other than making a profit, they have no reason to justify their actions, yet they’re still controlling the nation, and this is what I believe my strategy can stop.

I came up with the idea of the first aspect of my strategy, writing the book, while considering how to balance two very different approaches taken toward environmental activism, one by McKibben and the other by author Barbara Kingsolver. McKibben is more direct than

Kingsolver. His goal, as Van Jones, CEO and co-founder of the program “Rebuild the Dream,” explains, is “...to take [the] money away from the problem-makers and give it to the problem-solvers” (“Do the Math” 31:09). The “problem-makers” refers to fossil fuel companies while the “problem-solvers” are the more eco-friendly programs. In order to do this, McKibben’s been giving direct facts to the public such as those I’ve been relaying to you, and has participated in several non-violent protests. Unfortunately, while his work is certainly attention-getting, it’s also been viewed as aggressive and as pettily using “scare tactics,” hurting his and other activists’ reputations by making them appear too radical. On the other hand, Kingsolver has been far more reserved in her views. To get her point across, as she explains in an interview, she writes issues such as climate change into her novels, where “[c]ouched in fiction, ideas that might otherwise seem foreign...seem reasonable, because the reader trusts the character” (“The Moral Universe”). Kingsolver understands that people will listen more to others they can relate with, such as the characters of her stories, than scientists and activists “...lobbing facts over the wall” (“The Moral Universe”). This “lobbing of facts” is precisely what McKibben’s doing, and Kingsolver would most likely agree with his critics that he’s coming on too strong by directly telling the opposing side that they’re wrong. But in my opinion, by being at the opposite end of the spectrum she creates problems of a different sort, as she’s far too passive. In her interview, she compares her books to messages in bottles that readers may or may not take to heart, but they must because it’s a critical issue threatening the human race! Thus, I believe that we truly need a balance between Kingsolver & McKibben’s concepts. This is how I came up with the idea of a more assertive, nonfiction book that states the facts and grabs your attention, yet isn’t attacking you for wrong past thinking.

Further inspiration for this book came from a real-life example of such a writing that truly did change environmental policy: *Silent Spring*, by researcher Rachel Carson. My 9th grade Biology teacher suggested that I read it, and I was awestruck by the story. This book was written in the mid-1900s about the negative impacts of excessive use of pesticides, DDT in particular. I recall that the most depressing consequence was that on birds; the pesticide damaged eggshells, either killing birds before they developed or weakening them so they couldn't survive long. This was why the book was entitled *Silent Spring*; if DDT continued to be used, the birds would be gone and we'd never hear their songs again. The book spoke to so many people, that *Silent Spring* affected government policy. In fact, according to the online article "Legacy of Rachel Carson's Silent Spring," "Every one of the toxic chemicals named in the book was either banned or severely restricted in the United States by 1975" (Stoll). Carson achieved her purpose not by writing a cushy fictional story, but by providing actual facts and frightening hypothetical situations that could occur based off those facts. Kingsolver briefly mentioned that she felt people may not be as affected by nonfiction, but Carson certainly proved her wrong. Yet Carson's book still changed people's minds merely with her written word. If people were able to become more conscious of the environment in terms of pesticides this way, why can't it happen again with climate change?

People of McKibben's more direct mindset may still be skeptical of the ability of my book to unite people on this issue or to even be published in the first place. McKibben himself actually informs viewers of his video that he tried the book strategy with *The End of Nature*, published in 1989, and it wasn't as society-changing as he had hoped. How do I know the book will be a success? In terms of being published, the book is on such a crucial and

thought-provoking issue that I doubt it will be passed over by publishers. As for bringing readers together, this can be accomplished through the weak ties among acquaintances introduced by reporter and author Charles Duhigg in his book *The Power of Habit: Why We Do What We Do in Life and Business*. While he does only cite decades-old instances such as the Civil Rights Movement as examples of how these ties can make activism successful, I believe they can be just as helpful with my proposed climate-change movement today. Weak ties can bring the book to people from outside of close-knit groups, formed by strong ties between close family and friends (which Duhigg also informs his readers of), that are unaware of it, and through peer pressure to read the book the number of participants will increase. This will play out similarly to the Montgomery bus boycott so many decades ago when, as Duhigg informs readers, information about the boycott leaked into the newspapers and “...once the city’s black residents read the newspaper, they assumed...everyone else was already on board” (95), and felt obligated to participate. The impact of weak ties and the peer pressure they create certainly continues to be prevalent today with the advent of social media, which will greatly help word of my book spread.

Respect for friends created through the strong ties I mentioned did the same for *Silent Spring*’s audience back when the world was smaller and communities tighter. This is shown in the introduction to the 1994 edition of the book, appropriately written by Al Gore, who notes, “It was one of the books we read at home at my mother’s insistence and then discussed around the dinner table,” (“Legacy of Rachel Carson”). He later declares that “Rachel Carson was one of the reasons why I became so conscious of the environment” (“Legacy...”). Carson’s perspective-changing work only came to him through the strong bonds of his family. Therefore, I

have a theory that McKibben's book was ineffective because when it was published in 1989, the social world may have been at an intermediate stage in terms of relationships. The world was expanding and moving away from close bonds, but didn't yet have the technology to connect so many people through weak bonds. Since this is no longer the case, I predict that the new book will follow more closely the path *Silent Spring* took, except it will utilize weak ties more than strong ties. Those weak ties will also assist with increasing participation in the second part of my idea, which we will look into next.

After enough citizens have come to terms with the book's words and bonded together over the issue, they will commence the second step of my plan: actual non-violent protests for the government to truly make the shift towards clean energy. As I've mentioned, such protests to get regular people to believe in climate change can seem overpowering to that audience, but that aggressiveness can be used to truly show the urgency of the issue to *the government*. And in order to do this, we'll need someone to lead us, right? According to McKibben in his article "Movements Without Leaders," perhaps not. He writes that he believes the climate change movement is growing "...not despite its lack of clearly identifiable leaders, [but] because of it" ("Movements..."). Rather than having one overall "capital-L leader," the campaign instead has been organized by several "little-l leaders" all over the world. McKibben then proceeds to explain that this had to be done because today humanity's focus is dispersed, and it's difficult to bring everyone together in one place under the guidance of one person. In addition, just having one leader limits the influx of new ideas by other participants, and that one leader can also earn a movement a bad reputation, as Al Gore almost did when heading the climate change campaign (since he could be easily bribed with money or higher office as a politician). Those "little-l

leaders” or “elders” solve all these issues by simply leading their individual communities. They can connect each community to the big picture to create a “loosely-linked, well-distributed power system” (“Movements...”), without having to bring everyone physically together, merely offer advice rather than take command, and don’t lend just one face to the movement. In contrast, Charles Duhigg, author of the book *The Power of Habit: Why We Do What We Do in Life and Business*, believes having one overall leader for a crusade is critical, as this leader can inspire participants with their actions. Duhigg reiterates a famous instance of this when writing about how pastor Rick Warren expanded his church by providing parishioners with habits to live by that would bring them closer to the church. Duhigg personally interviewed Warren, who told him ““These habits become a new self-identity, and, at that point, we need to support you and get out of your way”” (Duhigg 99). The people who took these habits to heart then became examples for those around them, actually becoming McKibben’s “little-l leaders” in a way; the only true difference between McKibben and Duhigg’s views is that Duhigg believes a “capital-L Leader” is needed to begin the careers of those “little-l leaders,” whereas McKibben thinks they can arise on their own merely by viewing the urgency of a problem. I agree with McKibben, not only that these “elders” can get their start without one overall leader, but that they allow for a more democratic movement and will be more effective in my strategy.

In summary, the most effective way to get people to understand and want to do something about global warming is to write a nonfiction book that states the facts and opens people’s eyes. There may already be books on climate change out there, but they don’t appeal to both the logical and emotional parts of people’s minds like Rachel Carson did with her topic of pesticides; again, it’s that harmonization we need. With word of the book spreading through weak ties,

particularly in social media, previously debating citizens will be united against apathetic politicians, who will then have no choice but to listen and make reforms. The people's protests will be organized by "little-l leaders" and also expand through weak ties. This may sound like a complex answer, but climate change is a complex problem with many implications that must be resolved now. As an aspiring scientist, I can certainly attest to this, and I don't want to continue to do nothing when I'm fully aware that my species, and possibly all the organisms I may come to study, could die out because of humanity's mistake.



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