

Erika Reyes

A participant asked ‘*could you expand on shocking images vs. positive images for reporting about plastics and getting people engaged/take action*’?

For behavioural change, rely on positive images, emotions and stories that help people to find their intrinsic motivations.

Climate change and carbon reduction are topics that produce strong reactions in people. When someone truly acknowledges the reality of climate change for the first time, their feelings are often painful and hard to bear. The old defenses of indifference or false optimism don’t work: it’s no longer possible to say that you don’t care, or that you think that it will all work out. Anxiety, guilt or generalised distress seep through. If these feelings are not contained they can produce another layer of defense. Outbursts of anger, blame or cynicism appear and alternate with a sense of defeat and powerlessness. (Carbon Conversations, Rosemary Randall, 2017)

Fear, guilt or regret works only for 20% of the population, (Environmentum, 2019). These feelings are a potential roadblock when it comes to behavioural change: too often we’re motivated by negatives such as guilt, fear, or regret. Experts agree that long-lasting change is most likely when it’s self-motivated and rooted in positive thinking. For example, in an analysis of 129 studies of behavioural change strategies, a British research group found that the least effective approaches were those that encouraged a sense of fear or regret.

What have you found to be the best way to convince businesses to make a change in relation to single-use plastics?

You will need to see each person’s motivations. Money saving is one of the most common. Businesses want to do whatever will make their customers happy and we are lucky to live in a time where pollution is no longer invisible. *[For a lot of businesses, generating waste and plastic pollution was already a problem prior to climate change].*

The World Economic Forum found that over 65% of consumers are worried about climate change but 59% of them are unclear on how to engage with this critical issue.

Money saving, staying ahead of the curve (being pioneers in the city) and being more sustainable were the top motivations for restaurants to join Wisebox, Toronto’s first reusable container program [Erika Reyes organisation].

If we make changes at home and school will that really have an impact on a wider scale both locally and globally?

Every single action you take has an impact. Start from something you feel you can achieve (maybe push yourself out of your comfort zone a little bit). The first stage is to think about why you want to make that impact. Is it to raise awareness among your community? Is it about releasing your climate anxiety? Then think about what emotions you want people to feel with your work. Is it empowerment? A better understanding of climate change/plastic pollution? Remember that there are about 7,800,000,000 humans in the world. Collective action is paramount to fight climate change and plastic pollution!

There's a lot of noise about single-use plastic, how can I make my voice heard above the noise – with my school, with businesses, with local newspapers?

Be curious. First, ask yourself why you want your voice to be heard? Why is this so important for you? (Ask yourself this question 5 times to go deeper into your own motivations).

We don't need all to be famous and appear in the newspaper to make an impact. Raising awareness takes as little as refusing straws and free samples at the store, living your values and standing up for what you believe in.

Talk from your experiences or give affected people a voice they may not have; how is this affecting you/them? How is this affecting your/their life and how will it affect your collective future life? How will this affect your/their neighbours?

To talk about something, we need to be sure we understand the problem. Here are some videos I like:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RS7IzU2VJIQ>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=czgOWmtGVGs>

The documentary that changed my life:

Bag It: Is Your Life Too Plastic? is a 2010 American documentary film exposing the effects of plastic bags and other plastic consumer merchandise, and its effects on land ecosystems, the marine environment and the human body.

What can I do now while studying at home to make an impact to reduce plastics in my school when I return to class as a YRE?

I can't answer that for you, you can look around and be curious, research what other people are doing around the world. Ask your parents what are their feelings about plastic pollution and climate change? Ask your classmates, your cousins... You have the internet, you can even ask young people on the other side of the world or even your political leaders, what are they doing for one of our biggest challenges, plastic pollution? Be curious!

PJ Marcellino hosted the free webinar 'YRE: Tackling Pointless Plastic Packaging' with colleague Erika Reyes on Wednesday 17th June 2020. This webinar was organised by Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful as part of a series of online events tackling plastic.