

Headline: Katharine Hayhoe says the solution to climate change is simple: talk about it

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By Karina Kumar

Climate scientist Katharine Hayhoe said in her TED Talk Thursday the best way to convince people to care about climate change is to avoid arguing with facts and instead discuss the issue in a way that resonates with their personal values.

"The bottom line is, we don't have to be a liberal tree hugger to care about a changing climate," Hayhoe said. "All we have to be is a human living on this planet. Because no matter where we live, climate change is already affecting us."

Hayhoe, who was named in TIME's 2014 list of most influential people and Fortune's 2017 list of World's Greatest Leaders, conveyed the solution to climate change is simple: talk about it.

She said the polarized state of politics has created division even though the battle against climate change should unite humans.

"The fact that the number one predictor of whether we agree that climate is changing has nothing to do with how much we know about science or even how smart we are but simply where we fall on the political spectrum," she said.

Despite increasingly severe flooding, droughts, wildfires and superstorms, people who have built their identity on a certain set of facts won't listen to opposing views, Hayhoe said.

Hayhoe thinks that conversations about climate change shouldn't be focused on the science we already know because what really matters to people is their values, not facts.

"The most important thing to do is to start from the heart," Hayhoe said, "To start by talking about why it matters to us, to begin with genuinely shared values."

For instance, Hayhoe recalled noticing a banner with the Four-Way test at a Rotary Club where she was about to give a speech. The Four-Way test is a moral compass used by Rotarians which asks: is it true, is it fair, will it build goodwill and will it be beneficial. Hayhoe said she altered her speech to align with this test in hopes of connecting with the conservative people in attendance.

After her presentation, a banker came up to her and said, "You know, I wasn't sure about this whole global warming thing, but it passed the Four-Way Test."

Adjusting discussion to hit values that matter to audiences will lead to more success in conversations, Hayhoe said.

She also said that her faith is one of the easiest ways for her to connect with people of faith.

“As a Christian, I believe that God created this incredible planet that we live on and gave us responsibility over every living thing on it,” she said.

Hayhoe said that despite the severity of climate change, “scaring the pants off people” is not the way to go about making a difference.

“Fear is designed to help us run away from the bear,” she said. “What we need to fix this thing is rational hope.”

She said sharing examples of progress can give people hope and encourage them to act. For instance, China has invested hundreds of billions of dollars into clean energy and countries in sub-Saharan Africa are investing in pay-as-you-go solar power.

The largest United States army base, Fort Hood, in Texas is now powered by wind and solar energy and saves taxpayers “over \$150 million,” Hayhoe said.

But she compared these relatively small changes to millions of hands pushing a boulder down a hill. While all these hands have an effect, the boulder is not moving at the pace it needs to be, she said.

“But, we can't give in to despair,” Hayhoe said. “We have to go out and actively look for the hope that we need, that will inspire us to act. And that hope begins with a conversation today.”