

# new rules: new game

**Communications tactics for climate change.**

The game is changing behaviours;  
the rules will help us win it.

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sustainability communications



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**“Everybody talks  
about the weather,  
but nobody does  
anything about it.”**

Mark Twain

# □ rules and games

The challenge of changing our behaviour to stop damaging the climate can seem daunting. Behaviour change is difficult; people are complicated and don't always react as you'd expect.

Don't panic.

These short rules are communications techniques which pull together the most effective strategies for changing people's behaviour. They are based on a huge body of international psychological, sociological and marketing studies, gathered and analysed by Futerra. We've taken great concepts with terrible titles like 'psychological reactance' and 'symbolic self-completion' and translated them into simple-to-use communications tools to motivate behaviour change.

We didn't find a magic bullet or secret formula: just simple, practical tips to encourage behaviour change. These tips are the first step in taking the massive body of evidence and using it in day-to-day communications.

The New Rules: New Game isn't a simple, 'one size fits all' blueprint, and some of the tips might even, at first sight, seem inconsistent. But taken together, they provide a practical guide for action.

So... try a new communications tactic, apply these Rules – and create some much-needed change.



# remember...

Five of the principles we found are so important that we kept them separate from the main list. These five concepts frame everything that comes after them. They might be easy to agree with, and a lot harder to remember when you're planning specific communications work. But please try – they're the most important insights we've found.

## ▪ **Go beyond the usual suspects**

We all like talking to people with the same interests, outlooks and even clothes as us: the usual suspects open to climate-friendly behaviours and the 'seekers', 'pioneers' and 'ethical consumers' who are already changing. But there's been less success changing the behaviours of the people who think, feel and even dress differently from those usual suspects. Go find 'em.

## ▪ **Know the difference between sleepwalking and retail therapy**

Conscious and unconscious behaviours are different; active and passive, choice and habit behaviours. The difference is between the behaviour of *buying* a car (conscious, choice, active) and that of *driving* a car (unconscious, habit, passive). When people are on automatic pilot – which most of us are, most of the time – 'conscious, choice, active' messages won't reach them.

## ▪ **Refreeze good behaviours**

Once you've woken or 'unfrozen' people from their sleepwalking behaviour, you can convince them to change. But once they've adopted the new behaviours, you need to find a way of 'refreezing' them, so the positive behaviour becomes an unconscious habit again.

## ▪ **Forget bridging the 'value-action' gap**

Let's be blunt: we must stop searching for the sparkly magic bridge that simply leads from values to action, or from attitudes to behaviour. People's

behaviours, attitudes, values and awareness are all different and linked in complicated ways – if they're linked at all.

- **Change groups**

People don't learn or change alone. Society isn't made up of atomised individuals choosing how to act in complete isolation from those around them. The only way to change behaviour is to change what is socially acceptable: the so-called 'social proof'.

# who are you talking to?

The first lesson of communications is 'know your audience'. You can't talk to all of the people all of the time, so you need to research the interests, habits, social links and preferred communications channels of the people you want to reach. But there are two things to keep in mind whoever you're talking to:

## **1. Keep it personal**

Societal change is essential, but people's individual circumstances still matter. Once you've made behaviours 'socially acceptable', you'll need to make those behaviours relevant to individuals. Make your messages as personalised as possible. Create climate messages about *"my region, my town, my street, my house, me"*.

## **2. Help people to help**

People really want to be good, important and useful. Strange but true. Much climate change communications makes people feel bad, irrelevant and useless. Help people to understand (and trust) that they are making a difference.

Climate change isn't yet in most people's 'locus of control'; it feels like a big nasty threat they have no influence over. Until people feel on the inside that changing their behaviour will make a difference, no amount of information, price cuts or haranguing will bring about the change needed.

## the right message

The messages we use to influence behaviour are key. We're not going to say again that simple information messages are a poor motivator: you already know that. Instead, here's some clear guidance on what we should be saying and showing.

### **3. Make clear direct requests**

This is the principle of 'please do not walk on the grass'. It's important to be very clear and specific about the behaviours that help us tackle climate change. Take care to integrate other messages and behaviour change tactics, but don't forget to ask for what you want.

### **4. We're more worried about loss than gain**

Losing £5 feels more important than gaining £5. It's a small but powerful insight. Of course you can communicate the benefits of new actions, but lead in with the real losses people are suffering as a result of their current unsustainable behaviour.

### **5. Empathy and Imagination are power tools**

Empathy is a powerful motivator for change, but most people don't empathise with landscapes. If places are threatened by climate change, then show the people and animals who are in danger.

People are also more concerned about the threats that can easily be imagined or visualised (e.g. plane crashes) and discount those that are too general or distant (e.g. a rise in sea levels). Help people see the threat and see the solutions – and that means using pictures as well as words.

## **6. Strike a careful balance with your language**

The language we use to describe the challenge of climate change is huge, hyperbolic and almost pornographic; the language of the solutions is often all about 'small, cheap and easy'. We need to make solutions sound more heroic, use grander terms, and make the scale of the solution sound equal to the scale of the problem.

Remember to make good sound normal and bad sound rare. Being good is important but being normal is even more so. Every time we say that 'most people' aren't climate friendly, we've tipped the balance towards the wrong behaviours.

## **7. Feedback is crucial**

If you don't give feedback, thank people and acknowledge the progress made, then how can people be sure they're doing the right things? Feedback reduces anxiety, helps to reinforce behaviour and increases the belief that action makes a difference.

# **picking the right messenger**

## **8. Not all messengers are equal**

Egg-head scientists are important messengers: they have authority, and reassure people that someone understands the complicated issue of climate change. But we need common-sense and likeable intermediaries as well, to translate the opaque pronouncements of scientists into practical and obvious advice.



# how to reach people

There is a massive range of communications channels that can be used for climate change, from advertising to education, TV to literature, newspapers to door-stepping. Here are four key insights relevant to any channel and any audience:

## 9. Seeing is believing

Climate change is language-heavy, but light on visuals. Whenever you're tempted to say something, think whether you could show it instead. A picture speaks a thousand words – especially for solutions.

## 10. Remind, remind, remind

Marketers use 'retrieval cues' to remind shoppers in supermarkets about the adverts they saw on TV the night before. If you're trying to change habits, it's no good convincing someone just once. You need to remind them exactly when they're taking the action you want to change.

## 11. Pledges have parameters

There are some tricks to pledges. First, people need to promise *to someone*, not just to a website or to themselves. And second, people need to believe that the pledge *means something* to the person they're promising to. Commitment works, but only when personal and meaningful; otherwise, 'pledge' might not really mean 'promise'.

## 12. Try before you buy

Letting people trial, pilot and test behaviours in a safe setting is crucial if you're asking them to do something new.



# beware

The evidence highlights some nasty side effects and barriers to changing people's behaviour. Be aware and avoid them, or challenge them if you can.

## **13. The bystander effect**

If you know that lots of other people are aware of a problem, you're less likely to act yourself to solve it. Climate change suffers from the biggest and baddest bystander effect of them all – everyone else knows about it, so someone else will do something... right?

## **14. Free riders spoil everything**

Fairness is important and people hate it when others benefit from breaking the rules. Reassure people that there's a level playing field.

## **15. Tomorrow is less important**

We eat our cake today, and promise ourselves we'll diet tomorrow. The future is less important than the present, so all bad or inconvenient problems can be sent there. The positive side is that people are far more likely to commit to change if it doesn't affect them until tomorrow.

## **16. Beware 'totem' behaviours**

People often pick a small, insignificant behaviour to undertake or change to show others that they care, with no intention of changing anything else. (See Rule 19 below for ways to use this to your advantage.)

## **17. Money generates weak changes**

Decisions based on money are shallow and fragile, and can be very vulnerable to changing circumstances.

## **18. The 'sod off' factor**

Politely called 'psychological reactance', this means that many people's automatic reaction to 'you must do this' is a simple 'No!'



# tactics for change

In addition to the specific principles above, there is a host of proven tactics for behaviour change. Not all of these work at the same time, but they do work.

## **19. Salesman tricks**

### **A. Foot in the door:**

Get someone to do something small and then introduce another larger action once the small one is completed. The move upwards won't just happen on its own: communications are needed to link each rung of the ladder.

### **B. Hagglng:**

Ask for a big or difficult behaviour, then let people agree to something smaller 'for now'... but bigger than they would have accepted if offered it first!

### **C. Reciprocity:**

Give something (even if it's small) and people feel beholden to do as you ask.

## **20. Make experiences big, and regular**

Big sharp experiences affect behaviour more than a drip-feed of little ones. But those experiences don't have a long shelf life, because recent experiences matter far more than distant ones. Climate change communications need an ongoing series of peaks.

## **21. Catalyst actions**

Small behaviours don't automatically lead to bigger ones, but big and socially visible ones can lead to smaller ones. Fitting an energy saving light bulb won't convince people to buy a wind turbine, but a wind turbine on their roof may encourage them to buy the bulb.

## **22. Label people**

If someone undertakes a climate-friendly behaviour (whether they intended to or not), you should say *"thanks, you're clearly someone who cares about the climate"*. Next time you want something, say *"if you care about the climate you should..."*. They'll be more likely to pay attention, because they've started wearing a mental badge that says 'I care about the climate'.

## **23. Keep things compatible**

Try and show how a new behaviour already fits nicely with everything else someone does. If a new behaviour isn't shown as compatible with what they're already doing and thinking, then it's easier for them to ignore you than to change everything else in their life. We do like to be consistent.

## **24. Catch me when I'm open to change**

There are times of big changes in our lives: getting married, moving house, starting a new job, having a baby or retiring. People are far more open to change in these 'transition zones', because their habits are all in flux. Less significant times of personal change work as well. Try communicating on payday, in spring and autumn, during our summer holidays. Change people when they're already changing.

## **25. Make it a pleasure**

People are constantly trying to minimise time spent on 'personal admin' or chores, and increase the time available for leisure, pleasure, and fulfilment. If positive behaviour is in the 'chore' bracket, there's a lot less time/attention available then if it can be seen as leisure, pleasure or fulfilment behaviour.

# the rules of the game

Evidence base for the Climate Change Communications Strategy

The game is communicating climate change; the rules will help us win it.

**futerra**

Recommendations to the Climate Change Communications Working Group:



If you are inspired or sceptical, have questions or want to know more, then please contact:

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In March 2005, Futerra launched 'The Rules of the Game', the elder sister to this 'New Rules: New Game' guide. The original Rules were developed as a guide for communication which could change attitudes towards climate change. They formed the evidence base that underpins the ongoing UK Government campaign, 'Tomorrow's Climate, Today's Challenge' [www.climatechallenge.gov.uk](http://www.climatechallenge.gov.uk). That evidence base is still very relevant, and the following Rules from that document apply just as much to behaviour as attitude:

- Everyone must use a clear and consistent explanation of climate change
- The communications must be sustained over time
- Partnered delivery of messages will be more effective
- Government policy and communications must be consistent

But, in many cases, the tactics needed to change attitude are different to those needed to change behaviour. These new Rules should be seen as a complementary resource to the original version and not a replacement. Please contact us for a copy of 'The Rules of the Game'.