



**Hours of
Reality**
— Truth in Action —

Continuing the Conversation: **TALKING TO SKEPTICS**

It's going to happen. Talk to enough people about the climate crisis and you're going to encounter someone who's skeptical about the science — or just flat out denies what's happening right outside the window.

The first thing to do is breathe. Feeling upset is natural, given what's happening and what's at stake.

People are dying because of climate change. The future of this planet and my family is in danger and this person is pretending none of it's real?

Frustrating for sure. But your conversation will go a lot better if you can recognize one thing:

Your goal is not to change a skeptic's mind. It's just to open it, if only a crack.

DON'T TRY TO OVERWHELM THEM WITH FACTS

If you're someone who looks at the facts — say, the fact that 97 percent of climate scientists agree humans are behind this crisis — and makes rational decisions based on them, the natural assumption is that everyone else does too.

If I just present the facts, they'll see the crisis is real and change their minds.

The trouble is, people's brains don't always work that way. Especially if beliefs become wrapped into their sense of identity. Which often happens on climate issues.

In fact, presenting the facts can actually work against you. Psychologists have identified what's known as “the backfire effect,” where presenting people with evidence that challenges deeply held beliefs only makes them double down on that belief and become *more* attached to it. Not less.

So if your skeptic starts repeating the same old zombie myths that never die — like “There's been no real warming” — don't just trust in the power of truth and overwhelm them with facts. It's not worth your time and could generate resentment that works against you. *There's a better way — starting with recognizing where they're coming from.*

BROADCAST EMPATHY AND RESPECT

There are many reasons good people become climate skeptics — many completely understandable. Some get bad information from a source they trust and it sticks. Some work in fossil fuels or have connections to the industry and are scared about how they'll support their families as the clean energy transition gets underway.

But what's true for climate conversations is the same as for most issues: For people to change their minds, they have to be open to change. People want to feel respected. If they feel judged or slighted, they'll likely shut down and it's game over.

Broadcast understanding and respect for your skeptic. Let them know you see where they're

coming from. Deflect myths and make your response about the source, not them.

There's a lot of misinformation out there and fossil fuel billionaires have been spreading that point to protect their bottom line. If you're not hearing all the science or seeing climate change right outside your window, anyone would believe it. I totally get it.

A lot of people working in fossil fuels hear we need to shift to clean energy and naturally get worried about what it means for their jobs and their families. But the truth is, we can make this transition in a way that protects them and uses their expertise in green careers with a future.

LEAD WITH SHARED VALUES

Most skeptics have the same hopes and concerns we all do. They want to be able to support their families in jobs with dignity and they want a safe future for their kids. Make it easy for them. Lead with the points you agree on. Remember — your goal isn't to change their mind in the moment but to open their mind for change they choose.

Look, it doesn't matter what way you vote. We all want a strong economy with good jobs and a safe and healthy future for our kids. We've seen 18 of the 19 warmest years on record since 2001 and it's clear we've got to do something fast. We don't want to leave our kids a world where rising temperatures mean food and water become scarce, storms keep getting stronger, and droughts and wildfires never seem to end.

EMPHASIZE THE BENEFITS

Give people a vision of the future we all want, focusing again on shared values and hopes.

It's not just about the threat here. Experts project that by acting on climate and making a global transition to clean energy, we can add [\\$26 trillion to the world economy and create 65 million jobs through 2030](#). Imagine what these kinds of good jobs could do for us as a nation. As a community.

Just as important, by transitioning away from fossil fuels, we can clean up our air and create a healthier world for everyone, [preventing an estimated 3.6 million deaths from air pollution alone each year](#).

HIGHLIGHT THE MAINSTREAM CONSENSUS — AND CONSERVATIVE VOICES

We are social creatures. We like to be part of the tribe. When skeptics hear that the majority of Americans and people worldwide recognize the crisis is real and want action, it opens the door for them to reconsider their perspective. When they hear that even conservatives and former deniers are coming around, it gives them permission to do it.

People around the world see our climate changing and want action. [Seven in 10 Americans support government action on climate](#). [Eight in 10 EU citizens want more support for clean energy over fossil fuels](#). Clear majorities worldwide [see climate as the top threat today](#).

More and more former skeptics recognize the danger and want action. Even Frank Luntz — the man who for years advised fossil fuel companies to spread the myth of doubt to stall action on clean energy — has publicly said, [“I was wrong,”](#) and is working to help build support for climate solutions.

IN A NUTSHELL: GUIDELINES FOR TALKING TO SKEPTICS

- You don't have to change their mind today — just make them open to change.
- Don't overwhelm with facts.
- Broadcast empathy and respect for them as individuals.
- Lead with shared values and where you agree.
- Emphasize the benefits — especially in creating jobs and a healthier world.
- Highlight the mainstream consensus — and a wide spectrum of voices.