THE VEGAN ACTIVIST GUIDE TO STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS

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Study participants are identified by first names only.

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PEOPLE FAIL TO ACT BECAUSE THEY DON'T CARE OR THEY DO NOT KNOW HOW TO TAKE ACTION, NOT BECAUSE THEY'RE NOT INFORMED.

Why do people consume animal products even though we know from research that adopting a plant-based diet and consuming socially conscious products are good for our health, the environment, and the welfare of animals?

Activists often think people fail to go vegan because they don't have enough information. As a result, activists focus their time on trying to raise awareness. Yet, research tells us that raising awareness isn't sufficient and can even backfire (Christiano and Neimand, 2017). Raising awareness — designing a strategy centered on sharing information with people — can be a step toward driving a particular belief or behavior change, but it should never be the end goal.

Behavioral, cognitive, and social science tell us that people fail to act because they don't care or they do not know how to take action, not because they're not informed. Vegan activists must start with this foundation: If we want to see more people adopt a vegan lifestyle, we have to help them care, and we need to give them concrete, clear steps.

In this guide, you will learn the science of what makes people care and how to apply these insights to your activism. You will discover five principles for communication, rooted in academic research, that will help you strategically engage communities and more effectively drive belief and behavior change. With each principle, we will share the science that supports it, bright spots from studies and fellow activists, and exercises to help you put them to work.

This guide will help you think pragmatically about how to advocate for what you care about most. Activists are driven by their passion and belief that our world should — and could — become a better place. Connecting with people who have experiences different from ours, who may see problems and the world differently than us, requires that we strategically engage them in new ways of thinking and acting.

THESE PRINCIPLES INCLUDE:

- STEP INTO THE WORLD OF YOUR COMMUNITY
- TALK IN PICTURES TO OVERCOME BIASES AND ASSUMPTIONS
- USE EMOTION WITH STRATEGY AND INTENTION
- INCLUDE ACTIONABLE CALLS TO ACTION
- TELL STORIES WITH INTENTION

We must be hyperfocused on where our efforts can have the greatest impact. We must do less with more, which means using the limited resources we have — time, energy, emotions, and money — to communicate where it matters most. We must identify the narrow part of the river and use the best of what we know from research and practice to cross over it. Being strategic often means we have to set aside idealism for progress and drive new behaviors over time that build the world we wish existed.

Much of the research we share focuses on motivating people to adopt a vegan diet. However, the principles outlined here can also be used for communicating about other lifestyle changes. Incorporating these ideas into your work will take practice. Play with the ideas here. Try one of these principles at your next meeting. Use the insights you come away with to design a new event. Over time, this way of approaching your work will become second nature.

WHAT WE KNOW

TO CREATE CAMPAIGNS AND EVENTS FOR DIVERSE COMMUNITIES, WE MUST UNDERSTAND WHO MAKES UP THAT COMMUNITY AND THE SOCIAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL BARRIERS THAT FACE US AS WE SEEK TO ENGAGE THEM.

Demographic factors

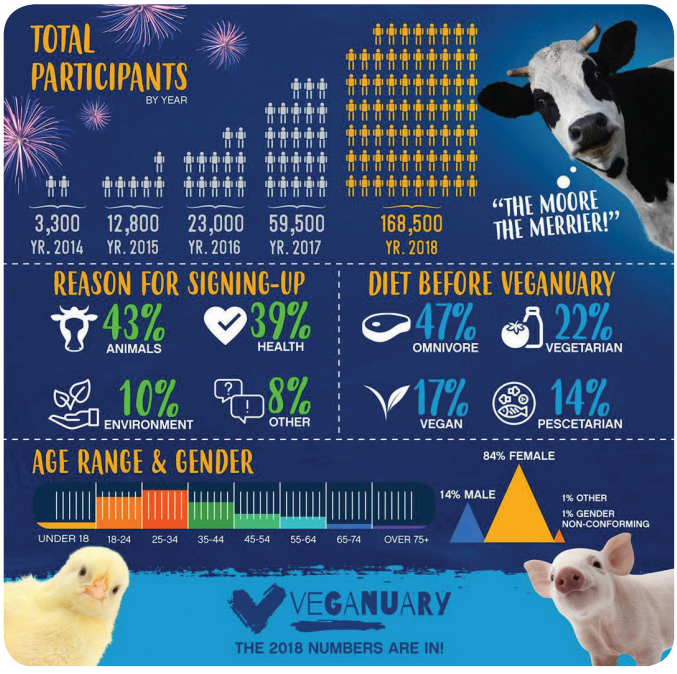
Survey data and academic research suggest age, income, and education influence whether someone is willing to try veganism. Younger people and college-educated people are more open to adopting a new diet, whereas older adults and people who are less educated are less likely to alter their eating habits (Lea et al., 2006). Perceived and real constraints, such as cost, convenience, food deserts, affordability, and aversion to unfamiliar foods, also stop people from adopting a plant-based diet (Asher and Cherry, 2015; Pohjolainen et al., 2015; Lea et al., 2006).

Women are more likely to adopt a vegan or vegetarian diet than men (Wyker and Davison, 2010). Research tells us that consuming meat is associated with masculinity and socially ascribed gender norms (Rothgerber, 2013; Christopher, 2018). Men and women provide different justifications for consuming animal products. Men are more likely to believe that humans are meant to eat meat, deny the suffering of animals, and provide religious and health reasons for consuming animal products (Rothgerber, 2013; Lea et al., 2006). Women are more likely to “look the other way” to justify eating meat, dissociating themselves from the animal on their plate.

Research suggests that veganism is usually a moral issue for women but not for men. Women are more likely to be concerned about the suffering of animals and support the animal rights movement (38). Having this understanding of the psychological ways that men and women justify their actions and their underlying beliefs about animals is critical to developing targeted communications.

According to a Gallup poll, liberals are more likely to be vegetarian (11%) or vegan (5%) as compared to conservatives (2%). Research tells us that people have different moral values that influence their beliefs and behaviors. Differences in beliefs track with political views. People who are more conservative tend to value respect for authority, preserving the sacred, and protection of the in-group. People who are more liberal tend to value justice and care or protection from harm (Haidt, 2011).

The reasons to adopt a vegan lifestyle are often framed using liberal values, such as protecting animals and our environment from harm. Veganism is commonly associated with alternative and progressive groups, such as punks, environmentalists, and human and animal rights groups, as well as with socially conscious movements, such as going green, Meatless Mondays, and shopping local (Cherry, 2015). As a result, vegan activists may signal cues to others that veganism is something that only liberals do.



WHY PEOPLE GO VEGAN... AND WHY NOT

AVOIDANCE OF NEW CONCEPTS. There are many reasons why people choose to go vegan. Some people are more neophobic than others and do not like to try new or unfamiliar foods and products. Ditching meat and trying vegan recipes can be a big ask for these people, eliciting negative emotions that may lead them to avoid the information you offer them (Hoek et al., 2011). However, research indicates that neophobic people may be more open to veganism if they can try substitutes that taste and feel like meat, such as the now-famous Beyond Burger (found in the meat section of grocery stores). This research further suggests that, for some people, we have to identify what stops them from going vegan and provide them with specific actions they can take to introduce themselves slowly to a new lifestyle.

HEALTH CONCERNS. Some people believe that eating meat is the best way to eat healthily and get sufficient protein (Wyker and Davison, 2010). Men, for example, often believe that they will lose body mass if they do not consume meat. Women report feeling concerned they will lack a variety of healthy food options. Understanding where groups see potential harm is critical for developing messages that correct these myths.

STIGMATIZATION. People sometimes do not adopt a vegan diet because they fear stigmatization. Researchers have found that people are less likely to go vegan when they do not have support from their friends and family (Markowski and Roxburgh, 2019). Historically, eating meat has been part of American culture. Choosing not to participate in this social convention can create conflict between individuals and their community. As a result, they are less likely to go vegan.

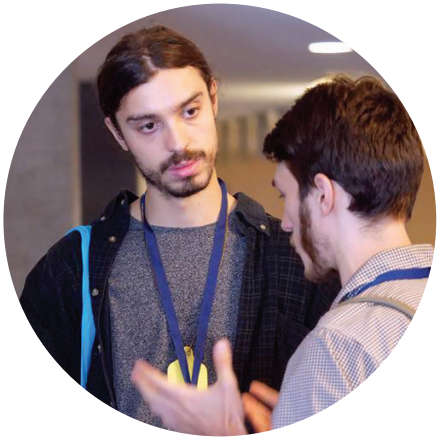
COMMUNITY. However, research suggests that people are more likely to become vegan if they are introduced to the lifestyle through friends and family. Sociologist Elizabeth Cherry (2015) argues that for people to be successfully recruited, they need opportunities for learning, reflection, and experiences that build their vegan identity. For retention, she finds that vegans need continued motivation and social support from family and friends to maintain their lifestyle. For example, when looking at vegan punk support, Cherry writes:

> **Vegan social networks provide participants with cultural tools that inform their vegan practices and shape their vegan identities. For all of the vegans in this study, these cultural tools included things like learning and sharing cooking skills. The vegans in the punk subculture also engaged in the active production and informed consumption of vegan subcultural items and practices (Chen 2012). This included listening to music, reading liner notes, playing in punk vegan bands, writing vegan zines, and participating in Food Not Bombs. These social networks and shared cultural tools ... helped retention in veganism as lifestyle activism.**

PLANT-BASED IFTAR

ETHICAL REASONS. A large body of research suggests that people become vegan for ethical reasons (animal rights and welfare, protection of the environment) or health reasons (weight loss or management, illness and disease prevention, overall health) (Latvala et al., 2012; Rosenfeld and Burrow, 2017).

INFLUENCERS. Documentaries, stories, and endorsements from messengers — such as social media celebrities, coworkers, family, and friends — influence people's intentions to go vegan (Asher and Cherry, 2015).



For example, research suggests that when people believe that eating plant-based foods is easy and convenient or they believe that going vegan is a socially acceptable norm, they are more likely to eat a vegan diet (Reipurth et al., 2019; Sparkman and Walton, 2017). Messages should show a target community that going vegan is socially desirable, normative, and easy to do.

FIVE STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION PRINCIPLES

Step into the World of Your Community

Activists and organizations often try to reach everyone with the same message, but research shows that people have different identities, interests, and values that shape what they engage with and how they respond to certain strategies. People avoid information if it makes them feel bad (sad or guilty), obligates them to do something they do not want to do or give up something they enjoy, or threatens how they see themselves and their deeply held beliefs (Sweeny, 2010; Greenebaum, 2012).

FOSTER POSITIVE EMOTIONS. The psychology of moral values and decision-making tells us that people make judgments based on their emotions and find reasons to justify their beliefs and actions. If information or an action makes people feel good, they will find a reason to justify why it is right. If information or an action makes people feel bad, they will find a reason to justify why it is wrong even if, objectively, it is not (Haidt, 2012; Piazza et al., 2019). We can see this play out with meat consumption. People find reasons to justify eating meat, such as citing concerns about nutritional value or convenience, to avoid feeling wrong about eating it. Doing so helps them rationalize their choices.

To motivate people to change their behavior, we have to talk about veganism in ways that foster positive emotions that will lead them to find reasons to justify engaging in vegan actions. To do so, we have to narrow in on or segment targeted communities to truly understand who they are, what they care about, and how they see the world.

TARGET THE MESSAGE. Activists tend to lead with their own values when making arguments (Feinberg and Willer, 2013). This approach can backfire if those values are in conflict with those of the target community. For example, leading with a message of protecting animals from harm may not be effective for people who do not hold the liberal moral value of protection from harm, or if they see it as natural and right to consume animal products (a worldview commonly found among men) (Haidt, 2012).

Activists should identify a target community and talk about veganism in ways that resonate with their values and beliefs and that provide benefits to them — such as solving a personal problem, helping them become a better version of themselves, or sharing content that is compelling and entertaining.

For example, Louie Psihoyos, Academy Award-winning documentary film director (*The Cove*, *Racing Extinction*), told us in an interview that his new documentary, *The Game Changers*, specifically addresses many of the psychological and social barriers that often stop men from going vegan. Based on the knowledge that people are more likely to adopt a vegan diet if it helps them achieve health and fitness goals, the film tells stories of the world's strongest athletes, ultimate fighters, and bodybuilders who have adopted a vegan diet to achieve their goals. The film features influencers that men are more likely to trust and seek information from about health and fitness. The film undermines the myth that meat

consumption is critical for building a strong, athletic body. It shows that many of the strongest men and women in the world are vegans and that the viewers, too, can achieve their fitness goals by eating a plant-based diet.

You might take a similar approach when introducing veganism to a new community. Leading with stories of people who were able to solve a problem or be a better version of themselves will be effective in helping that community care about veganism. Hosting a screening of a documentary such as *The Game Changers* at gyms and university athletic clubs and with niche health and fitness groups (for example, runners, CrossFit enthusiasts, yoga practitioners, recent moms who want to lose baby weight) could be effective in bringing people into the movement and motivating lifestyle changes.

In a similar example, sociologist Elizabeth Cherry (2015) found that those in the punk subculture strategically connected veganism to their identity as punks. They communicated about veganism in ways that told others that they can be better punks if they become vegans. Lucian, a participant in the study, told Cherry:

> **When I got more into the music scene, it became easier to become vegetarian. It was almost like you felt obligated to do it. But I think the music came first, but then [being vegetarian] definitely fed the music thing, like I'd read about some vegan band in a zine or something ... I definitely felt like it helped that I had something in common with those bands.**

Importantly, she noted that punks distribute information about veganism through popular mediums within the subculture, such as zines and music events. Cherry described how at punk rock shows there is often a vegan potluck for the bands and audience, introducing it as the norm and demonstrating that it is an important aspect of being punk. After the shows, the bands distribute animal rights literature at the merchandise table.

By sharing information about veganism in places punks frequent and in ways that help punks become better versions of themselves, these activists are better able to spread veganism through their networks, build the identity among their community, and provide the support they need to maintain the lifestyle change over time.

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF MORAL VALUES AND DECISION-MAKING TELLS US THAT PEOPLE MAKE JUDGMENTS BASED ON THEIR EMOTIONS AND FIND REASONS TO JUSTIFY THEIR BELIEFS AND ACTIONS.

YOUR TURN

To segment communities, we must identify problems veganism can solve for a particular group of people. You might, for example, identify a group of people with a specific health challenge who could overcome that challenge with a plant-based diet. Framing the information you offer in the context of health and talking about veganism in a way that solves their problem will make them more open to considering the idea.

For example, in an interview with Jane, a vegan activist who helps organize Veganuary, she told us that she tries to identify the interests of the communities she is working to engage:

> **For me, it's just finding out where people are and where that individual is coming from, so tapping into things that they already care about. Whether it is their companion animals, or if they've got environmental concerns, or if they recycle ... Are they getting older? Do they have health concerns?**

Identify trusted messengers or influencers, such as bodybuilders or punks, for these different groups and work with them to share information with their networks. People became vegan because they were introduced to it by people in their social tribes, such as foodies, health enthusiasts, yogis, punks, hipsters, environmentalists, and religious leaders. Work with their trusted messengers to introduce veganism in their own environment and within the channels of communication they use (such as social media, events, and press) in ways that connect to what they care about.

Identify social groups or other movements with interests that intersect with yours and work to connect veganism to the change they are working to create. For example, you might join an environmentalist group that is working to reduce a community's carbon footprint and talk about veganism as an advocacy action for the group. Or you might work with integrative health practitioners to provide information about veganism to their patients.

LET'S BRAINSTORM

1. **Identify a goal for action: What is the specific behavior you want people to adopt?**
2. **Find the right community**
   a. Create a list of reasons people would want to adopt that behavior.
   b. Identify groups that are most likely to be interested in the reasons you list: health, fitness, environment, animal lovers, etc.
   c. Pick one group. What does that group care about the most?
3. **Develop your message**
   a. How can you talk about the behavior in a way that resonates with their values, solves a problem for them, or helps them become a better version of themselves?
   b. What stories can you share that would inspire them to try veganism?
4. **Get your message in front of them; i.e., develop your tactics**
   a. Where do those people seek information about their interests?
   b. How can you go to where they are to connect them to veganism?

Talk in Pictures to Overcome Biases and Assumptions

A challenge in communicating about veganism is that the term itself is abstract and leaves space for people to insert their assumptions as to what they think it means. Vegans are often stereotyped as extremists or fad followers (Cole and Morgan, 2011; Greenebaum, 2012). People also often assume that to go vegan, they must give up their beloved habits and delicious foods. If people hold biases or have misinformation about what it means to be vegan, they will insert their beliefs when presented with an abstraction, such as the word "vegan."

USE CONCRETE LANGUAGE. Similarly, animal law scholar Elizabeth Decoux (2009) writes about the challenge of using the abstract term "animal rights." She writes,

> **The idea has been tugged at and contorted to cover so many different concepts that it remains stretched and misshapen. Since speakers and writers have attached the label to such a large assortment of incongruous and conflicting organizations, ideas, and acts, the words are actually an impediment to communication and potentially a tool for obfuscation.**

Research tells us that it is important to use concrete, visual language that illustrates meaning when communicating. Neuroscience has shown that people make decisions in the visual part of their brain (Brascamp et al., 2015). People are two to three times more likely to remember your message if you use concrete, visual language (Bauer, 2009).

To overcome biases and misinformation, activists should use specific and figurative language to illustrate exactly what it means to be vegan. Instead of saying "go vegan" (an abstract concept), you might say "eat a plant-based diet." Or, as we observed in our research at the Ocala Veg Fest in Florida, one speaker said, "eat fruits and vegetables."

USE VISUAL LANGUAGE. Using metaphors can be a powerful tool in evoking specific emotions and connecting to an individual's values. (Lakoff and Johnson, 2008). Using language such as "eating clean," "healing foods," and "whole foods" creates a particular image in the minds of the audience that can help them imagine what it would be like to eat a plant-based diet.

Martin Luther King Jr. was the master of using visual language to overcome biases and inspire action. He used visuals to describe justice and freedom that allowed his audience to imagine specifically how an equitable world might look. In an address delivered at the March on Washington, he said, "One day right there in Alabama little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls as sisters and brothers," and "... sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave-owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood."

Decoux advocates for describing or sharing scenes of animal cruelty to build a picture in the minds of your audience and elicit visceral reactions. Leading with

shocking and devastating images has mixed results. Some argue that it is the best way to create moments that inspire veganism and accurately show the realities of factory farming and animal testing. Others say it will only backfire, as people avoid information that makes them feel sad, guilty, or disgusted. What works will be specific to the target community.

PERSONALIZE THE MESSAGE. For people who see animal rights or veganism as a moral issue, leading with the rights and welfare of animals will likely be effective (Jasper and Poulsen, 1995; Decoux, 2009). For people who are more conservative, it may be more effective to show them images of food contamination to activate their moral value of preserving the sacred/pure. Images that make people feel sad, angry, disgusted, or guilty are likely to be useful only if they are followed by specific and meaningful calls to action that will allow the person to feel like they can make a difference relative to what they are seeing.

Vegan organizations and activists tend to lead with communications that use an ethics frame; that is, asking people to take action on behalf of animals and the planet. Yet, research suggests that a self-interested approach — talking about the benefits to the individual — may be more effective for convincing some people.

For example, at the Ocala Veg Fest and the Gainesville VegFest, activists talked about the easy changes they made to their diets and the benefits it had on their appearance, athletic ability, and general well-being. They used visual language that helped the audience imagine what it would be like for them to adopt a vegan diet. This use of visual language did not elicit the strong negative emotions that would lead people to turn away. Instead, the speakers connected to the interests and challenges people face by leading with curiosity and hope.

USING METAPHORS CAN BE A POWERFUL TOOL IN EVOKING SPECIFIC EMOTIONS AND CONNECTING TO AN INDIVIDUAL'S VALUES.

YOUR TURN

For this exercise, practice talking about veganism in a way that connects to the values and interests of a target community and in ways that overcome abstraction with visual language. To begin, write out an argument, speech, or story that you commonly share with people to introduce them to veganism.

1. Go through your writing line by line and underline concrete images you create with your words. Example: "veganism" vs. "eating fruits and vegetables," "shop cruelty-free" vs. "here is a list of makeup brands that don't practice animal testing."
2. Circle the words and phrases that are abstract and not visual. Try to rewrite those words using figurative language or metaphors. Example: Rewriting "eat vegan food" to "eat food that grows in the dirt, not stalls."
3. Going back to the previous exercise, which communities did you identify as segments to engage? What are their interests, values, and existing beliefs about veganism in relation to health, fitness, environment, or animal welfare? What are the reasons they likely have for not being vegan?
4. Read through your argument. Are you using visual language to paint a picture of veganism that counters the assumptions or biases they have? Are you helping them see themselves as individuals who can become vegan by including descriptive language that connects to their interests and concerns?
5. Next time you are organizing an event or writing for a campaign for the identified group, practice using this approach in how you talk about veganism. You might even play with not using the word "vegan," but simply describing what it means to act as a vegan.

Read *The Intercept* article "The FBI Hunt for Missing Piglets is About Protecting Factory Farms" and circle the visual language the author uses to build an understanding of factory farming. Notice how he uses visual details to capture the attention of the reader and paint a picture of factory farming.

Use Emotion with Strategy and Intention

How we feel about an issue drives how we think about it. We form judgments based on the emotions we experience. When something makes us feel bad, we will find a reason to justify why it is wrong or avoid it. If something makes us feel good, we will justify why it is right (Graham et al., 2012; Haidt, 2012; Kahneman and Egan, 2011; Howell and Shepherd, 2012).

When we experience negative emotions without a way to resolve those feelings, we find a way to avoid the information. In many qualitative studies, researchers have found that vegan activists describe communities tuning out and turning away from stories and images that make them feel sad or guilty (Bosworth, 2012).

INVESTIGATE A RANGE OF EMOTIONAL ANGLES. Vegan activists often believe that negative emotions will incite action and use sad stories and videos of animals or shocking images of slaughterhouses to pull on people's heartstrings. Yet, we know that people tend to turn away from this type of information. Vegan activists must use other emotions to engage communities. We can use a full range of emotions to inspire action. The science of emotion tells us that each of our emotions evolved to serve a different function. As activists, we must use these emotions with intention.

Anger lowers our ability to take the perspectives of others, and it encourages us to form quick, emotionally-driven decisions rooted in stereotypes. Anger, however, is a powerful emotion for mobilizing people against a common offender or enemy (Bodenhausen et al., 1993; Yip, 2018).

Fear makes us want to fight, freeze, or flee. When we don't know how to take action against what we

fear, we will flee. Neuroscientist Abigail Marsh (2019) argues that when we see an animal or a person in fear, their face looks most similar to an infant's round eyes, cheeks, and raised eyebrows. As a result, the part of the brain that evolved to protect children is activated, and we want to reach out and help.

People, particularly women, are less likely to eat animal products when they see pictures of baby animals. In one study, researchers showed participants images of farm animals and asked them to decide whether it was wrong or not to harm them (Piazza et al., 2018). The participants didn't know that some of them saw images of baby chickens, and others saw adult chickens. Participants rated it more wrong to harm the baby animals than adult animals. The researchers found that this was because participants saw the babies as cute, which evoked feelings of tenderness, whereas the adult animals did not evoke such emotions.

FOSTER POSITIVE EMOTIONS. When messages make people feel guilty, they respond defensively — from downplaying the amount of meat they eat and avoiding information to anger and hostility toward vegans. One study found that anthropomorphizing

THE SCIENCE OF EMOTION TELLS US THAT EACH OF OUR EMOTIONS EVOLVED TO SERVE A DIFFERENT FUNCTION. AS ACTIVISTS, WE MUST USE THESE EMOTIONS WITH INTENTION.

animals through the metaphor “animals are friends” induced participants’ feelings of guilt toward eating pig (but not cow). These feelings reduced intentions to eat pork in the future (Wang and Basso, 2019). However, the researchers note that food preferences are markers of people’s social and cultural identities. Communication that elicits guilt may backfire if it threatens how people see themselves. Leading with positive emotions may be a way to overcome such psychological tendencies.

Sociologist Elizabeth Greenebaum (2012) writes, “The chances of a stigmatized identity increase if the vegan approaches the subject with a fervor that makes the omnivore angry and uncomfortable ... it is critically important to represent vegetarianism and veganism in a positive light in order for their audience to listen and accept what they hear.” To counteract information avoidance by their audiences or burnout from sadness and anger-inducing stories, activists should convey the positive emotions that people want to feel or include ways to resolve those negative feelings through actions.

Jo-Anne McArthur / We Animals

What positive emotions should you use? When people feel awe, the overwhelming positive feeling of being diminished in the presence of something greater than the self, they are more likely to be altruistic, self-reflective, open-minded, and generous (Piff et al., 2015; Rudd et al., 2012).

Pride is effective in motivating people to engage in altruistic behavior (Boezeman and Ellemers, 2007). People are more likely to act out of anticipated pride and feeling good about themselves, than guilt (Michie, 2009). Researchers from The Vegan Society suggest that in developed countries more people are reducing their meat consumption as a way to feel good and have an impact on the world. Highlighting the pride that vegan activists feel in living a healthy lifestyle and making choices that are better for themselves, animals, and the planet is an excellent way to engage audiences.

Encouraging hope and curiosity can be effective, particularly when leading with an environmental and personal health frame. Sharing stories of how people have been able to overcome health challenges can provide hope for people who have experienced illness and make them curious to find out more.

For example, plant-based chef and advocate Deliciously Ella uses her platform — which started from a personal blog and evolved into an app, recipe books, a deli, a range of plant-based food products, and a growing social media community — to talk about the health benefits of adopting a plant-based diet. Ella regularly shares stories of overcoming and managing her chronic illness through a plant-based diet and the wellness and pride she feels in inspiring others to eat more vegetables. As a young female entrepreneur, promoting food as a lifestyle shift that can have positive impacts on mental and physical health connects to the interests and needs of her followers.

In our interviews with vegan activists, they shared great examples of using positive emotions with intention. Jane told us that she steers away from blood and gore and tries to create a positive, welcoming community that does not alienate people for not being strict in their vegan practices. She says,

> **I think the formula is working. If we go hard-line, we’re alienating a part of our community. Veganuary is friendly, positive, encouraging, inspiring, and people are happy to be aligned with that. And the media will cover Veganuary extensively, particularly in the UK, every year. The one that has created the most sign-ups has been a celebrity cookbook that’s vegan with meal plans. In previous years we have also used a comedian video. We’ve had five comedians say a joke about veganism. It’s not all lentils, you know. Those are the best-performing ones.**

PEOPLE ARE MORE LIKELY TO ACT OUT OF ANTICIPATED PRIDE AND FEELING GOOD ABOUT THEMSELVES, RATHER THAN OUT OF GUILT.

Jenna, another vegan activist, told us that her group will often hold food demonstrations or have chefs show people how to make easy meals at home. "I think that's the top on my radar for most effective activism because it's just a really positive way of getting people without feeling attacked," she said. Food demonstrations are a positive way to connect people to veganism through curiosity.

YOUR TURN

How can you use specific emotions with intention? What are you asking people to do? How would they feel listening to you and doing that action? To begin to play with different emotions, try the exercise below. You will see three campaign prompts, each with a different emotion. Try developing a campaign using the emotions indicated. Mix and match. See how they look and feel different when you mix emotions.

Prompts	Emotions
A social media campaign to engage local animal lovers in your community.	Curiosity
You are at a community event tabling, and a father and his daughter come to your table to learn more.	Hope
You're writing an op-ed for Meatless Mondays in your local school district.	Pride

Include Actionable Calls to Action

People often fail to act because they do not know how to act. Activists must include calls to action that tell people exactly what to do. Many activists and organizations turn their goals into their calls to action (CTAs), but this approach may backfire if the goals are too big or abstract for people to take on. A call to action such as "end animal cruelty" or "go vegan" is abstract and a big ask that assumes people know what to do.

If we want to see a world where more people are vegan, we must be strategic with how we craft our calls to action. Science tells us that effective calls to action are specific, meaningful, and actionable.

USE SPECIFIC CTAS. In one study, researchers provided two groups of university students with different calls to action. One group was told to go out and make the campus more environmentally sustainable. The other group was told to go out and increase recycling of a particular material on campus. Both groups had 24 hours to complete the task. In a follow-up survey, the researchers assessed how happy the participants were with their actions. Participants who had the concrete goal of increasing recycling of a particular material reported greater happiness, feeling more successful, and were more likely to volunteer again (Rudd et al., 2014). This research suggests that specific calls to action are more effective and can sustain engagement better than general messaging.

SCIENCE TELLS US THAT EFFECTIVE CALLS TO ACTION ARE SPECIFIC, MEANINGFUL, AND ACTIONABLE.

Vegan activists should identify communities that are likely to try veganism and provide specific calls to action connected to what they care about most. For example, Jane told us that as part of her activism she asks people seeking healthy New Year's resolutions, vegetarians, and people who are animal lovers to try vegan recipes for the month of January. She told us in an interview:

> **The idea behind it is a month where people would be interested because of New Year's resolutions around health. It creates a community spirit you get when everybody is doing something together. And a very specific call to action: try vegan this January … We've tried advertising at vegetarians, people who have shown interest in animal welfare issues. For the first time this year, health has overtaken animals as the number one reason why people have taken the pledge. We have very different messaging. A practical guide with recipes, cookbook. It's a free download. Also, meal plans created by a registered dietician.**

> **We look at how to veganize meals. Making that step and transition as easy as possible and showing them how. When we first started, there wasn't as much practical support as much as nowadays. There was a lot of organizations using the "why" approach where Veganuary was a more practical approach. We had 600 recipes with health and nutrition and practical label-reading guides.**

USE MEANINGFUL CTAS. Calls to action must be meaningful. Including calls to action such as, "for more information, sign up here," "sign our petition," or "follow us on social media," can leave people feeling like their actions will be a drop in the bucket and won't make a substantial impact. To be effective, people have to feel as though their action will make a difference.

Research suggests that people do not act when faced with mass atrocity because, when a problem feels too big, people experience pseudo inefficacy — they feel they will not be able to do anything to affect the problem. As a result, the negative feelings trump any positive feelings they may experience from taking action (Västfjäll et al., 2015; Västfjäll et al., 2014).

USE ACTIONABLE CTAS. When designing a call to action, people need to see how that action will make a difference. Calls to action must be tailored based on the underlying values and motivations for going vegan. For example, people cite health, animal welfare, and environmental reasons for reducing consumption of animal products. While we haven't seen an increase in Americans identifying as vegetarian or vegan, we have seen a spike in sales for plant-based foods. One Gallup poll reported an 8.1 percent, or $3.1 billion, increase in sales of plant-based foods and non-dairy beverages in 2017. This increase suggests that many non-vegans are trying vegan products. What is motivating this behavior change? People are learning about vegan products that they believe are good alternatives, whether they are motivated by their own health goals, a desire to lower their carbon footprint, or a wish to reduce harm to animals.

Connecting the purchase of a particular product to a direct impact on a particular outcome is a good example of a meaningful call to action. What does this look like in practice? In printed materials shared at the Ocala Veg Fest, PETA2 provided information on the inhumane scenarios happening in the dairy industry, coupled with images of cows. This information is designed to make the reader angry at the dairy industry and potentially open to taking action. At the bottom of the flyer is a section that says "Try These Tasty Vegan Products" and shows images of a range of dairy alternatives, including non-dairy cheese, milk, sour cream, and yogurt. The flyer also includes

a number to text for free vegan recipes. Including this information not only helps the viewer resolve the negative feelings they may have from the content, but it tells them precisely what they can do to help.

Calls to action must be actionable. We cannot include calls to action that are too hard to achieve or too outside of our target community's daily habits and routines. As activists, we must understand the lives of these communities and suggest actions that make sense for them. Rather than giving communities big calls to action like "stop puppy mills," you could say something like "don't shop, adopt." Or, instead of "don't eat meat," encourage people to try Meatless Mondays.

One of the reasons we have seen an increase in the purchasing of vegan products is because restaurants and grocery stores provide alternative products in the places where people are making purchasing decisions. Having almond milk or oat milk in the refrigerator section next to the dairy milk is one way to normalize a dairy alternative. Doing so makes it familiar and accessible and inserts the behavioral option into the daily routine of a community. Food samples coupled with vegan literature at grocery stories, food festivals, sporting events, and social gatherings where people are making decisions about what they want to eat is another way to encourage people to try veganism (Bosworth, 2012).

YOUR TURN

For the first exercise, we asked you to identify a community based on their interests, identities, and/or values. Now that you have identified that group, tailor a call to action for them that is specific, meaningful, and actionable.

For example, if you are talking to a fitness community, ask them to try a plant-based protein supplement in their smoothie. If you are talking to environmentalists, ask them to lower their carbon footprint by switching out dairy milk for oat milk, the most sustainable milk alternative.

Tell Stories with Intention

Storytelling is the most powerful tool we have for conveying information. People are more likely to remember your information if it is shared as a story (Bower and Clark 1969; Graessier et al. 1980). When people reflect on memories, they construct them into a narrative. When they think about the future and the actions that they will take, people often base them on a story they want to tell about themselves.

THE POWER OF STORYTELLING. When people are engaged in a compelling story, it feels as though they have entered a new world. If a story feels real and the audience experiences the world of the characters, it can result in powerful changes to the audience members' mindsets. We are less likely to argue against information when we are transported into a story because we are in a cognitive state where we do not expect people to try to persuade us (Green and Brock, 2000). Stories may be particularly effective when they are told in apolitical spaces, such as television, movies, novels, and museums.

Unlike any other forms of communication, stories hold our attention. Great stories keep us on the edge of our seats, wondering what will happen next. They provide opportunities for the audience to see themselves in, and connect with, the story's characters. Counter-narratives, stories that break expectations and stereotypes, have the power to shift our beliefs and assumptions (Christiano, Neimand and Sheehan, 2018).

STORYTELLING IS THE MOST POWERFUL TOOL WE HAVE FOR CONVEYING INFORMATION.

SEVEN BASIC PLOTS

CONSTRUCTING YOUR STORY. Stories must include properly constructed narratives to carry the cognitive benefits of storytelling. A vignette or a message is not a story. A story follows the narrative arc. It has a beginning, middle, and end; conflict and resolution; and characters and settings.

Additionally, stories have plot structures. Researchers have studied thousands of stories and identified a handful of plot structures. Journalist and author Christopher Booker (2004) spent 34 years examining narratives, and he wrote a book outlining his findings. He argues that narratives fall within seven basic plots or models: overcoming the monster, rags to riches, the quest, voyage and return, comedy, tragedy, and rebirth.

Depending on who your audience is, you will want to use different plot structures. If you're introducing an idea that is new to an audience, you might use a familiar plot structure like rags to riches or the Cinderella story. Doing so will help the audience understand how they should think about the issue. They can identify who is the Cinderella, who is the Evil Stepmother, how it is likely to end, and whose side they should be on. If a topic is familiar to an audience, and they are perhaps disengaged because they have heard and read too many stories that are similar, a new plot structure may be more effective.

For example, in the story "The FBI's Hunt for Two Missing Piglets Reveals the Federal Cover-Up of Barbaric Factory Farms," the author does a fantastic job of situating piglets as the victim and farming practices as the villain. The reader leaves believing that factory farming needs rules and regulations to eradicate animal cruelty. In other words, the story helps us see that animal cruelty is the result of a system and not just an individual. The story uses several different plot structures. It is an overcoming-the-monster story because the piglets are saved from the farm. It is a rebirth story for the piglets who start a new life. And, it is a tragedy because we know there are pigs who will continue to suffer until we introduce new policies or until more people choose not to eat meat.

EXEMPLIFY THE DATA. Rather than leading with statistics to engage and mobilize people, activists should tell stories that exemplify the data (Slovic and Slovic, 2013). Research shows us that large numbers are not effective at conveying the meaning of mass atrocities and devastation in ways that inspire empathy and action. As social psychologist Paul Slovic (2010) writes, "Numerical representations of human lives do not necessarily convey the importance of those lives. All too often, the numbers represent dry statistics — 'human beings with the tears dried off' — that lack feeling and fail to motivate action." Telling stories can convey information in ways that are compelling, memorable, emotional, and persuasive.

TYPES OF STORIES. What types of stories should you be telling? We suggest capturing a set of true stories that you can use in different situations. Peg Neuhauser, in her brilliant 1993 book *Corporate Legends and Lore*, described a core group of stories that any organization or cause should be able to tell about their work. They include:

▶ **ORIGIN:** Tell the story of why you became vegan. Include visual language and emotions to draw in the audience. Create opportunities for the audience to see themselves in your story — shared values, challenges, and interests. Jenna, a vegan activist, shared her origin story from her childhood with us. She said,

> **I was inspired by my pot belly pig that my parents brought home when I was a baby. When I was five, my mom made me sausage, and I started to make connections. I was looking at the vegetables on my plate; I was looking at the sausage; and I was trying to figure out where vegetables come from and where sausage come from. When I asked my mom, she lied to me. She told me all the different synonyms of what sausage was — it's like bacon, it's like pork, it's like a meat. I couldn't get down to what it was. When I finally figure it out, I was horrified.**

▶ **ASPIRATION:** Help the audience members imagine how the world will be different if they go vegan. Highlight how they will feel physically and mentally, the impact their action will have on the environment, or the animals they will save because they made simple changes to their lifestyle. Tell the story of a person, like them, whose life changed because they went vegan.

▶ **PEOPLE:** Share the stories of people who are vegan or are transitioning to veganism, and how they have overcome a challenge or the difference they have made.

For example, Jenna shared the story of her mother's and uncle's choice.

> **My mom had a heart attack a few years ago. That's what got her to go vegan, because she was afraid that she wasn't going to be alive anymore. When I share this with other parents, people start to think 'oh my gosh, I need to start thinking about my children and my future with them. I need to be around them.' I talk about my uncle who got diabetes and could reverse it with a plant-based lifestyle. One out of three people has diabetes, so that hits close to home, almost everyone knows someone with diabetes.**

▶ **FAILURE:** The best stories are those that are authentic. Speaking vulnerably about things that are hard to talk about is one way to build authenticity and help your audience connect to your ideas (we are all human, after all).

▶ **SUCCESS:** Share success stories. Not every success has to be huge and transformative. You might share how someone was able to manage an illness with a plant-based diet or about a farm animal that lived a better life when it was saved from a factory.

YOUR TURN

There are multiple ways you can use stories to engage people in veganism. You can tell your own story or share stories about other vegans, particular animals, or people transitioning to a plant-based lifestyle. You can also use existing stories shared through film, books, and art to start conversations about veganism. In our interviews with vegans, they shared that it was often a story from a friend, a family member, or a documentary that sparked their curiosity.

As an advocate, you should equip yourself with a set of stories you can use. Remember, storytelling takes practice. Storytelling will be difficult when you begin to include it as part of your strategies. But, just like learning a musical instrument or any new skill, eventually it will become easier.

1. Review the list of story options.
2. Choose one to experiment with.
3. Map it out on the narrative arc below. Include characters, setting, conflict, and resolution. Identify a plot structure to frame your facts.
4. Map out the emotions you want people to feel at different parts of the story. Be thoughtful about how you want the audience to feel after reading or hearing the story.

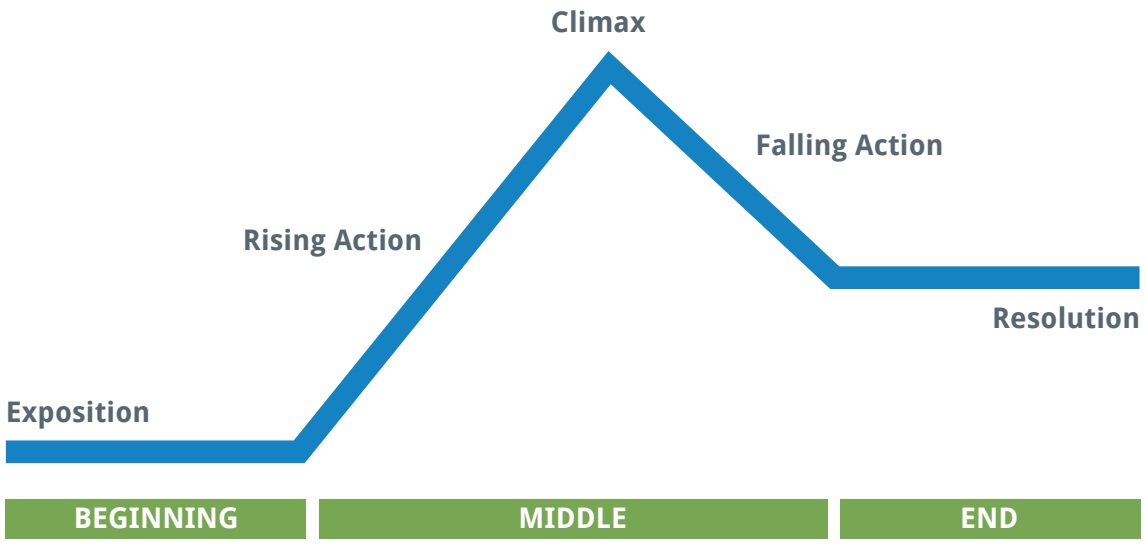
CONCLUSION

In your quest to increase the number of people who adopt a vegan lifestyle, remember that simply giving them more information will not change their behavior. If you can incorporate these five principles into your communication strategies, you can begin to effectively drive belief and behavior change.

Like learning to play an instrument, it will take time to perfect using these tools. To start using the principles, challenge yourself to apply one of them each week. For example, spend next week using visual language in at least one email that you send or plot out the structure of a story you tell and see if you can identify the structure.

Over time, this way of approaching your work will become second nature.

STORY ARC



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