

## Dealing with Controversy<sup>i</sup>

1. Consider the source: Is your audience naïve and unsure, or strongly committed to the skeptical view?
2. Be compassionate: To accept the scientific view of climate change, people sometimes need to:
  - a. Go against what they are being told by trusted sources
  - b. Agree with people they normally think of as unlike themselves
  - c. More importantly, deal with a really challenging reality
3. When faced with a threatening message, such as “climate change is real and there are big implications for all of us”, people either:
  - a. Engage in problem-solving behavior, or “fight”: Learn more, learn what to do, learn how important it is, take action, help others take action.
  - b. Engage in emotional-coping behavior, or “flight”: Deny there’s a problem, deny that it’s important, deny that we can do anything, blame the messenger, make ad hominem attacks (but Al Gore flies around in a private jet!)
4. In order to help people opt for problem-solving we must:
  - a. Dialogue, not debate
  - b. Tell the truth, don’t sugarcoat it or catastrophize it
  - c. Highlight the nature of science
  - d. Understand the misinformation out there
  - e. Empower and engender hope
  - f. Walk our talk
5. People are motivated more by what they could lose than what they could gain. But, they need hope in order to act.

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<sup>i</sup> “Fostering Sustainable Behavior: An Introduction to Community-Based Social Marketing”, Mckenzie-Mohr and Smith, New Society Publishers, 1999. ISBN 0865714061