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Working Toward Eco-Inclusion, not Eco-Superiority

We have moved past the years where environmentalism was confined to a select club of dedicated environmental trailblazers. Unfortunately their 'eco-superior' level of commitment and action was so far above what many 'regular' folks could achieve that many chose not to take any action at all. Of course, there are very few people who truly do not care about the environment. What differs amongst us are individual beliefs in our ability to affect it.

But like it or not, climate change 'belongs' to all of us. And the same is true of the environment in general we all breathe the air and drink the water; we all eat food grown on the land and power our lives with energy generated from natural resources. And more frequent and intense weather events such as droughts, flooding and ice storms don't play favorites.

So how do we recognize and take ownership of this and still live our lives? The reality is that life keeps happening – take kids to school; rush to work; late for dinner, order out; something breaks, buy something new; paint your house; worry about finances -LIFE.

The answer is – don't let life get in the way. Wade into this new world up to your comfort zone and, dare I say, convenience! For some, that comfort zone is expansive and they have already given up their car and installed solar panels on their house. But for others, that comfort zone and desire for convenience may just give them the range to stop using plastic bags, turn their heat down a few degrees, and walk to work once a week.

Some people change for large visionary reasons – they've read about peak oil and the need to reduce our reliance on fossil fuels. Some people change for economic reasons – smaller and more energy efficient homes and cars save money and allow more financial security. Still others change for moral and environmental reasons – treading lighter on the earth and using less resources for the sake of future generations. And yes, some change because 'green is in'. No matter your reason, the most crucial aspect of your 'change' is that it is for the long haul. Someone said to me recently, "we are not going to recycle our way out of this one". Very true. The human propelled aspect of climate change has been in motion for many years, and we should not be lulled into thinking that the fix will be quick and painless. (And still, recycling IS important on many levels!)

Al Gore's Oscar-winning movie was titled 'An Inconvenient Truth' for a reason. Change in our lives, of any kind, is not always convenient. In fact, some may never make change of the inconvenient sort, but they may make changes that are convenient, and environmentalism needs to be accessible to everyone.

The very complex world of 'climate-change-causing-greenhouse-gas-emissions' often confounds even those of us who spend some time in this arena. So for the average citizen figuring out how to navigate their way to a smaller carbon footprint, it can be overwhelming. But don't be paralyzed by indecision, instead forge ahead with lifestyle changes that you can handle. And don't worry about what your neighbours and your colleagues think -the environmental playing field is leveling year by year and the sum total of our commitment does matter. That doesn't mean we will stop climate change in its tracks,

but it might mean we will increasingly use our democratic rights to push for more stringent environmental policies and use our vote for change.

In his thought provoking book 'The Tipping Point', Malcolm Gladwell states: "*In order to create one contagious movement, you often have to create many small movements first*". Don't doubt that we have one going here in Fredericton. Yes, there will be disagreements and stops and starts, but let's work towards eco-inclusion at each level at which our citizens wish to participate.

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