

How to Be an Earth-Friendly Consumer

Introduction

The speaker of this persuasive speech is Jorge Fontanez, CEO of B Lab U.S & Canada and a Google Next Gen Policy Leader who assesses how businesses tackle environmental and social justice. With over 20 years industry experience and two years as CEO of B Lab, Fontanez utilizes his skillset to lead economic systems change that benefits people, communities, and the planet.

Fontanez is giving a TED Talk on how to be an environmentally conscious consumer and support companies committed to protecting the planet. According to the TED Foundation, its goal is to “provide a platform for thinkers, visionaries and teachers, so that people around the globe can gain a better understanding of the biggest issues faced by the world, and feed a desire to help create a better future.”

The in-person audience is curated by the TED team, and audience members must submit an application to be selected. However, TED Talks can later be viewed free of charge on the internet, which means they have a far-reaching audience from all over the world. According to Statista, 54% of the TED audience is female and almost a third of viewers are between the ages of 25-34 years old. The United States generates the most traffic toward the site, followed to a lesser extent by India, Canada, the United Kingdom, and Japan.

This particular speech will target global consumers who are concerned about climate change and the environment and interested in ways they can easily support companies who work toward reducing their carbon footprint and protecting the planet.

Speech

Let me begin today by asking you a few questions: Do you recycle your soda cans? Do you compost food scraps in a backyard bin? Do you bring reusable bags to the grocery store? Now ask yourself, why do you do this? My guess is you want to protect the planet and you feel a little guilty if you're not doing your part. But what if I told you that *individuals* are not the biggest contributors to climate change? According to a recent report by the Carbon Disclosure Project, 71% of all global greenhouse emissions come from *just 100 companies* (CDP, 2017).

Now think again: Do you consider yourself an environmentally conscious consumer? Do you pay attention to the purchases you make, the stores where you shop? Do you consider the impact those products or companies have on the environment?

According to a recent Nielsen survey, 81% of people said that it's important for companies to implement environmentally friendly practices (Nielsen, 2022). This is the good news. Consumers are paying attention, and the momentum is here. We consumers have the power to choose where we spend our money, and we can make informed decisions about what to buy and where to shop to lessen the harmful impacts companies have on the environment.

For more than 20 years, I have helped corporations across the country develop social and environmental practices that are better for our planet, and now as the CEO for B Lab U.S. & Canada I am doing even more of that important work. B Lab is a nonprofit network that has over 4,000 B Corporations in over 70 countries and 150 industries (B Lab, n.d.). We have over 100,000 companies managing their *own* social and environmental impact using our B Impact

Assessment (B Lab, n.d.). This is my passion and my life's work, and today I'm going to share with you just how damaging a corporation's carbon footprint can be and what *you* can do about.

Now, a few more questions for you: Do you drive a car? Cook with a gas stove? Use a gas-powered lawn mower? Did you know the top environmental offenders across the globe are in the energy sector? A group of writers called The EcoExperts compiled data to produce a list of the most polluting companies in 2023, and the *top nine* were producers of coal, crude oil, natural gas, and petroleum (Howell, 20213).

How many of you reach for a beer made by Anheuser-Bush or a soda from Coca Cola when you're ready to unwind? Pour a bowl of General Mills cereal for your kids in the morning? Grab a Hershey's chocolate bar when you need a little something sweet? If you've ever done any of these things, you are contributing to another group of top environmental offenders (Engage the Chain, 2019). The Natural Resources Defense Council, an environmental advocacy group, says that "the top 15 U.S. food and beverage companies generate nearly 630 million metric tons of greenhouse gases every year" – a bigger emitter than *all of Australia* (Axelrod, 2019).

What else do we use that is harming the environment? Have you had a baby and gone through six to eight diapers a day? Do you put a dryer sheet in the dryer with each load of clothes? Do you blow through tissues in the winter with every blow of your nose? Pampers, Bounce and Kleenex are just some of the products made by major offenders in the tissue sector - Procter and Gamble, and Kimberly-Clark. Their disposable paper products generate an estimated 46 million metric tons of greenhouse gases annually (Axelrod, 2019).

If you're starting to feel a little overwhelmed, it's only natural. But what you *don't* have to feel is helpless, because there *is* something you can do and it's easy. Simply do a little research before making purchases. Check the B Corporation's website to find Certified B Corporations around the world.

You may be asking yourself, what is a B Corporation, anyway? For a company to become certified with B Lab they must earn a "B" or better on the B Impact Assessment (B Lab, n.d.). *You* can encourage companies to be a force for good by rewarding them for their efforts. Make a commitment to purchasing their products, and tell your friends to do the same!

Earlier I asked you a bunch of questions, but now I just want you to picture a few things in your head. Picture a planet that is better off simply because consumers like you make smart choices. Picture a planet that is cleaner for our children simply because big corporations realize they have to change their ways.

As a father of two, there is nothing more important to me than fighting for my children's right to live on a healthy planet, so they don't have to fight so hard themselves. And we can teach *them* to be conscientious consumers, too. Just last week, my teenage daughter excitedly proclaimed that she found a new B Corporation - Bare Kind, a small company that makes animal-print bamboo socks and donates 10% of its profits to animal protection organizations. She wants to spend her *own* money to give a pair of panda socks to each of her friends for Christmas, not only so they

can sport matching socks, but also because she has a heart for animals and knows that part of her hard-earned babysitting money will go to Panda International.

As I leave you today, I hope you will remember one thing: *Consumers are in control*. You can make purchases from companies committed to reducing their carbon footprint. You can do your own research. Which companies are the worst offenders? Avoid them. Which companies are certified B Corporations? Buy from them. If consumers like you say no to companies that pollute the air we breathe or the water we drink, consumers like you have the power to save our planet.

References

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**ChatGPT prompts*:

- “*Brainstorm ideas for a persuasive speech about the environment*”
- “*Write a persuasive speech outline encouraging consumers to support eco-friendly companies*”