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The 5 Fundamentals for Social Change Videos

Presented by:



In Partnership with:



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Introduction

What do you care about most deeply? How do you think the world needs to change? And most importantly ... when's the last time you made a video about *that*?

Upworthy, a media company focused mostly on stories about important topics related to people trying to do good in the world, has curated and created over 10,000 videos and has learned some pretty big lessons about what makes them actually work – or not!

Here are five of those lessons straight from Upworthy that can help you create social-change videos that make an impact:

01.

Your strength is your voice. Use it.

Creating a video about a heavy topic like gender equality or racism doesn't mean that you have to change your tone, style, or technique.

If your strength is comedy, use comedy to make your social-change message engaging. If your focus is beauty, use beauty.

Even though the topics might feel new, remember: Using your own voice is more important – not less – as you engage with larger societal issues.

How should you do it?

As an example, watch John Green of the VlogBrothers dive into the complicated world of health care costs without skipping a beat (or taking a breath):

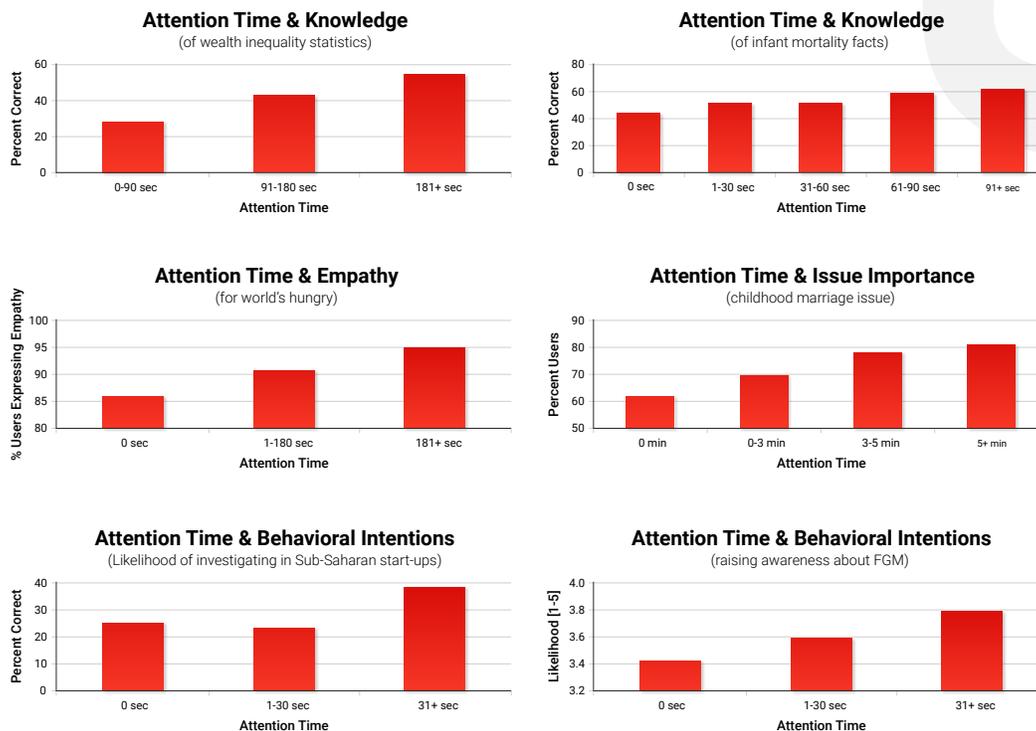


[Why Are American Health Care Costs So High?](#)

Why is using your voice so powerful?

Because – according to the Pew Research Center – **the skills you use to build and entertain an audience turn out to be the same skills that can help build trust between you and your viewers.** With that in mind, is it any surprise that Jon Stewart’s satirical, passionate “Daily Show” was considered [one of the most trustworthy news sources?](#)

Upworthy conducted a series of studies² that show the more time people spend paying attention to issues like global health and poverty, the more knowledgeable they become and the more likely they are to take concrete steps to address them.



Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation / Upworthy³

This may sound somewhat unsurprising. But the thing is: Most people are not very good at attracting the attention of others. The more you can use your voice to draw attention to things that matter, the more impact you can have.

02.

Stories stick while facts fade. Find the story.

When delving into a new issue or topic, it's obviously important to do your homework: Watch thought-provoking videos from people you respect, do some research, get the facts.

But don't expect those facts to be compelling or convincing on their own. Raw information alone doesn't always make people care about social issues. But striking visuals and personal stories that make important ideas come alive – they do. So use relatable comparisons and visualizations or connect the facts to really great stories.

Or ground your entire message in a personal story, like Dan Savage did here:



[It Gets Better: Dan and Terry⁴](#)

Or like Dina Tokio did here:



[AIRPORT SECURITY DON'T BELIEVE I'M BRITISH⁵](#)

There's a mountain of social science research that demonstrates the power of stories to make facts and ideas memorable, powerful, and actionable. But our favorite example is about selling beer.

To measure how people respond to advertisements, the American Association of Advertising Agencies published a [two-year study](#) that monitored things like the heart rate, brain waves, and skin conductance of a person while they watched two different ads from two different beer companies. The first ad was information-focused – the main point was that Beer A was better than other beers. The second ad told a story about a group of friends having fun that kept viewers engaged until the end. The result of the study? “Ads that tell stories and engage and involve consumers create stronger emotional relevance than product-centric ads.”

Amazingly, the findings from beer commercials hold true for social change. Upworthy saw this in two studies conducted from its own research⁶: When they presented a lot of data and information, people felt overwhelmed – it reminded them how much they *don't* know. But when they focused on the stories of individual people, the facts came alive, and the point got across far more strongly.

So if you want to make change, start by finding a great story to tell.

03.

Courage is contagious. Spread it.

For almost all of us, there are parts of ourselves we don't talk about out loud and that don't always line up with who we are expected to be by mainstream culture.

It's hard to share these things that make us feel vulnerable, but "going there" can actually help strengthen your bond with your community. And sometimes, when we're lucky, opening up actually eliminates some of the power that those vulnerabilities have over us. You may not feel so vulnerable anymore – especially when your community begins to support and identify with you.

As long as we feel physically safe, sharing our true selves with the world can be a good thing: It shows our communities it's OK to "go there" too. We make clear through these actions that there's more that unites us than divides us.

Want to see what courage and authenticity looks like?

Here's Laci Green, opening up about her struggle with depression:



[Depression⁷](#)

Vulnerability can be a powerful tool for a number of reasons. Upworthy co-founder Eli Pariser gave a talk about the remarkable power of vulnerability and the way it affects both shame and hate in a keynote address at YouTube's Summit for Social Change:



[Eli Pariser - YouTube Summit for Social Change⁹](#)

But one of the most potent reasons is also quite simple: **Relationships are built on vulnerability.**

In [a famous study by Dr. Arthur Aron¹⁰](#), strangers were paired together and took turns asking each other questions about their lives. By the end of the 36 questions, the strangers felt as close to each other, on average, as they did to other significant people in their lives – and two of the original participants ended up getting married.

The questions produced such a strong sense of intimacy in part because they highlighted the hopes, embarrassments, and humanity of each person – their vulnerabilities! It's important to respect your own limits and personal security, but bringing that same spirit to your videos can be a great way to develop the sort of deep, trusting relationship with your audience necessary to drive social change.

04.

Communities are complicated. Learn from them.

Talking about controversial, divisive issues can be tough. But it gets a lot easier if you think of your community as people who can help push you forward, not hold you back.

Remember: Your community is made up of people who are just as complex and well-meaning as you are. Listen to them. And respect them by talking about the things *you* care about most, not just the things you think *they* expect you to.

Along the way, despite your best efforts, your community is likely to tell you that you got something wrong. And sometimes they'll be right. Remember: Social change is a process for each and every one of us, and we all evolve and make mistakes.

The key is to figure out how to *hear* constructive feedback and take part in a deeper conversation with your community. Don't let a bad comment bring you down or make you write off a member of your audience for life. (Of course, some folks are just jerks, or worse. Tune them out – or report them if they violate the YouTube community guidelines.)

Here's how Francesca Ramsey shared her story of getting it wrong – and learning from the experience:



[Getting Called Out: How to Apologize¹¹](#)

Think about it this way: You're the leader of your community. **And leaders who ask for and listen to feedback are far more effective than ones that don't.**

Leadership consultancy Zenger Folkman [measured this effect¹²](#) by surveying 51,896 executives and asking them to rank their peers. Among the group that asked for feedback the least, very few were ranked highly as leaders. But the leaders who were most open to feedback were ranked right near the top (86th percentile, on average) in overall leadership effectiveness.

Asking people what they think of you and your ideas or actions is a sign of real respect. And if you can incorporate constructive advice, suggestions, and critique into your work, it's one of the best ways to go from good to great yourself – and to inspire your community to follow your example by learning from the experiences and beliefs of others.

05.

People want to help. Give them something to do.

If people take the time to listen to you about a topic or cause that's important to you, odds are, they'll want to help. So try to make a video that makes helping easy for them.

You'd be surprised how many amazing videos highlight a problem or tell a compelling story and then don't make it clear what someone watching can do about it! Can we say missed opportunity?

On any topic, there are a lot of possible calls to action. Sometimes the goal is simply to change perceptions, beliefs, or behavior. Or maybe it's about getting people to donate or take action.

Either way, decide at the outset what you're trying to accomplish with the video and how you want your viewers to participate.

You don't have to promise that your video or their action will fix everything and change the entire world – realistic expectations are important! But you do need to inspire viewers to *want* to do something, and then give them something clear to do to help make it happen.

There are two good reasons to do this, one from behavioral data, listed below, and the other from behavioral psychology.

The first one is pretty obvious: People are more likely to do something if you ask them to do it directly. Nobody wants to be pushy, but if you want to make an impact, you have to ask people for help. It's a tactic we've seen work again and again, from driving petition signatures to funding pledge drives.

The second is less obvious: **Giving people an action to take lets them know the problem is solvable and there's something specific they can do to help fix it.** That there's hope! And many studies – [including our own](#) – have shown that higher levels of activation, positivity, and empowerment lead to higher levels of social action. When you don't provide people with a real way to help fix things, you risk them turning away and tuning out.

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So what's next?

Voice, story, courage, community, and action

– those are the five fundamentals of a social-change video.

Now, it's time to put them to use.

To demonstrate what we mean about giving people something to do, why not take a few minutes right now to write down a topic you care about deeply and come up with one quick idea for a video you could make about it. If you love it, make it. If not, at least you've begun the journey.

And with that, you're on your way.

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Footnotes

1. The opinions expressed in this video are solely the content creator's and are not necessarily representative of YouTube's positions
2. Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation / Upworthy. "[The Gates Foundation tackles the toughest problem of all](#)", August 2015. Participants: 7,768.
3. Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation / Upworthy. "[The Gates Foundation tackles the toughest problem of all](#)", August 2015. Participants: 7,768.
4. The opinions expressed in this video are solely the content creator's and are not necessarily representative of YouTube's positions
5. The opinions expressed in this video are solely the content creator's and are not necessarily representative of YouTube's positions
6. Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation / Upworthy. "[The Gates Foundation tackles the toughest problem of all](#)", August 2015. Participants: 2603.
7. The opinions expressed in this video are solely the content creator's and are not necessarily representative of YouTube's positions
8. The opinions expressed in this video are solely the content creator's and are not necessarily representative of YouTube's positions
9. The opinions expressed in this video are solely the content creator's and are not necessarily representative of YouTube's positions
10. Dr. Arthur Aron. "[The Experimental Generation of Interpersonal Closeness: A Procedure and Some Preliminary Findings](#)" State University of New York at Stony Brook. Participants: 330. 1997.
11. The opinions expressed in this video are solely the content creator's and are not necessarily representative of YouTube's positions
12. Harvard Business Review. "[Overcoming Feedback Phobia: Take the First Step](#)", December 2013. Participants: 51,896.

 Creators for Change