

Al Gore continues the fight

But can the former US vice-president use a more persuasive approach?

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The US is a strange country. On the one hand, it is the country that by far spends the most on research and development – as much as the next four countries put together. On the other hand, many citizens are deeply distrustful of scientific findings. Scientists in our society are entrusted with the task of deepening our understanding about ourselves and the world around us. In most major countries, they and their work are held in high regard; but, as I said, the US is a strange country.

Despite their appetite for knowledge, the US is a country deeply divided – schizophrenic really – about some scientific findings, particularly if these are inconvenient to our way of life, as is the case of climate change. And there are unscrupulous political, business and religious leaders who exploit this situation to promote their own goals.

A few months ago, I had the rare fortune of participating in a three-day climate leadership course led by Al Gore and his colleagues – a fascinating and enriching experience (visit <http://climaterealityproject.org> for more details). Most non-US participants, however, were surprised at how much of Gore's presentation still focuses on the basic climate science and overcoming denialism. While there are many US states, cities and businesses that are building momentum in tackling climate



change and other urgent environmental issues, many are still rejecting the basic evidence that much of the rest of the world has accepted.

Regretfully it does not take many denialists – just a few well-paid ones – to sow a lot of doubt. And this doubt-industry is very much economically and politically motivated. If you are a US energy company relying on fossil fuel, you are quite likely to deny the facts and fund ‘professional’ denialists. If you are a republican, you are likely to believe climate change is a myth, is overstated or that we cannot do anything about it.

In the meantime, reports of unusual and severe weather events are multiplying. It is maybe not unfortunate that some of these have been hitting the US. This is giving Gore and other US climate campaigners hard-felt evidence to convince the die-hards.

I do think though that Gore and others should, in addition to providing a scientific basis for their arguments, focus more on the many inspiring stories of what is already being achieved. This is proven to be a more persuasive tactic in overcoming resistance to change. And stories now abound of what visionary and caring leaders, at all levels of society, are doing to create better world.

These leaders are tackling social issues, climate change and other environmental concerns at local and global level. They do not let themselves be constrained by out-dated ways of doing things. They are rewriting the rules. They are the courageous heroes of our time that will be remembered.

Many CEOs are now starting to understand the business case for doing well while doing good and are using this philosophy to install a deeper purpose in their organisations. They realise that saying “no” to the old way of doing things, allows them to say “yes” to new and exciting opportunities. And who would not rather work for a company that has the courage to break the mould and embrace business unusual. These organisations are taking a longer view and are redefining their role in society. They are learning more about our society’s challenges and are finding innovative ways of doing business in a manner that benefits everyone, now and into the future.

But back to Mr Gore. Much has to be said for his staying power. He could have long retired and lived a life of leisure. Instead, he is as energetic as ever in winning political and corporate support for tackling what many call humanity’s single most-pressing issue. It says a lot for him as a selfless leader that a decade

after his term as US vice-president, he has stuck with this toughest of challenges. There is no doubt that he is a worthy recipient of the Nobel peace prize.

As for the deniers – whether here or in the US: let them continue their denial along with those that say evolution is just a theory and human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) is not the cause of acquired immune deficiency syndrome (Aids). Our society continues to evolve and some individuals and organisations keep pace with that change, others are not able to.