

Chesapeake Conservation Landscaping Council's  
3<sup>rd</sup> **Turning a New Leaf** Conference  
Friday, December 4, 2009  
George Washington University, Washington, DC

**PLENARY ADDRESS**

*The World Outside: What They Say About Why Your Work Matters*

Eric Eckl, Water Words That Work

In the U.S., only about 250,000 to 500,000 people, or 1:1000 are “like us” – green professionals. Several case examples demonstrate that people who become “green” follow a common path – (1) a “first impression” of an issue or practice; (2) taking a small, first step; (3) an attitude change; and (4) taking a big step in support of the issue, or in implementing the practice. There is a mistaken impression that attitude change precedes the first step. However, most people will take a small first step because you ask them to take it. They feel good having done so, leading to an attitude change and bigger steps.

First impressions/First Steps

Info USA profiles consumers. They looked at recreation activities in the five bay states:

- 2.56 million gardening
- 1.3 million fishing
- 86 million hunting
- 77.4 million camping
- .5 million boating

Study looked at what's important to them:

- 53 percent say pollution
- 44 percent say habitat loss

A Chesapeake Bay Trust study in 2008 – *Marylanders and the Environment* – revealed that 55 percent said the Chesapeake Bay is important to them. Yet it doesn't feel that way. Research reveals that, for example, 60 percent of people surveyed did not know who does licensing of fishing; some said it is the National Park Service.

We tend to confuse how loud one person is with how many people feel that way (complaints weigh heavily). The number of dissatisfied will never be 0, and 3 percent will never be quiet.

A rookie mistake in developing promotional materials and projects is to give people too much information too fast. At the first nibble of interest, we pile on with our handouts, etc. Better to provide a bit of information, enticing them to learn more on their own.

We also need to be careful about using jargon. Only 40 percent of people in one survey could pull the definition of the word “watershed” from four choices in a multiple choice question. Lack of confidence is a big barrier. If we try to make them talk like us, and they don’t understand the language, they’re not going to say anything.

In 1984, a very important study was conducted of recreation in America. Results showed that people who remember spending time outside with their family as children are 50 to 60 percent more likely to report that they recall being satisfied with family life as a child, and 50 percent more likely to say they are more satisfied with family life today. They are more likely to be satisfied with friends, over their lifetime; choice of careers; overall success in life; and with quality of their lives generally.

This research shows that the most important thing a parent can do is to make sure to spend time with the children outside. Also, it indicates that we can increase the effectiveness of promotional materials by reminding the audience of this connection. When we show young and old people together outside, it taps into a deep vein.

## **Q&A**

*What do you say about the word stormwater?* It’s an awful word, runoff not much better.

*Can kids transfer their enthusiasm about the environment to adults?* Market research results are inconclusive.

[Summary prepared by Carol Jelich]