

My name is JD Russo, I am 16 years old, and a high school student.

I am not a professional activist. I learned about plastic pollution as most of you - by observing my community, from talking to others, from the Plastic Pollution Coalition, by reading and educating myself. And once I learned, it was difficult to go back. I started noticing every straw, every plastic lid, every plastic container. And I wanted to talk to others, and share what I now knew.

Plastic pollution is not like global climate change - with much debate and nothing tangible. It is not like carbon emissions in the atmosphere.

It is visible. It is a daily choice we make.

Yet, somehow, people choose not to participate in the solutions. It is not that did not know or see, they simply did not care.

Today, in the face of science and studies about the dangers of toxins leaching out of plastics, people continue to drink plastic bottled drinks, continue to use single use and disposable plastics.

Why is it that when people know these bottles, straws, cups, utensils will last forever, they continue to use them, regardless?

There is no connection with people between the science and taking action, and there is a huge indifference to the consequences.

In our country, in our communities, indifference is a growing reality with people around us.

The indifference of the passionate is not the absence of zeal but a lack of concern for others who don't share their values.

And so, I became really interested in finding what creates the strongest response, what breaks through the indifference, what moves people to action.

In November of 2010 I was invited to speak at TEDxGreatPacificGarbagePatch, a conference organized by the Plastic Pollution Coalition, and dedicated to the global plastic pollution crisis.

There, as I was listening to scientists, environmentalists, explorers and other well informed people, I began to realize that to help people care, we need to present them with more than facts. We will need to reach both their hearts and minds, and make an emotional connection with the topic. So how do we touch someone so profoundly that they will radically change their behavior patterns?

I found two answers:

(1) art, and the emotional response it generates

## (2) working with young people

Here's how Chris Jordan, an American photographer has chosen to illustrate our consumerist habits. His large scale images that depict massive volumes of plastic pollution. This image shows one million paper cups, the amount used every six hours on US Airways.

This next image depicts 400,000 bottle caps. This is the amount of plastic bottled drinks consumed in the United States every minute.

This is another image by Chris Jordan, of a baby albatross chick in the Midway Islands. The bird was not at all altered from how it was found on the beach.

And the art of Lila Roo, a dancer, and an artist.

And the art of Dianna Cohen, an artist who has chosen to work with plastic and has created images of beauty from plastic pollution.

It is absolutely essential that the topic of plastic pollution must reach the hearts and minds. Art has been an expression of humanity's emotion for as long as we have existed.

Another way that stands out as one of the most effective, and yet also one of the most overlooked – involving youth as advocates against plastic pollution.

Young people are impactful for a number of reasons, perhaps most notably because *we are the future*. What affects the future state of the world more than anything are the choices people of my generation will make.

And it is critical that youth advocates are the ones to relay the message to other youth. So often attempts by adults to communicate to youth in a way that they believe will reach them just come across as phony, or fake and contrived. Instead of spending time and effort trying to research the best ways to market to youth, we can avoid the problem entirely by involving them from the very beginning.

I have top three Do's and Don'ts to adults speaking to people of my generation:

- DON'T try to be us, to use words we use, to try to fit in. It looks fake. Just be yourself and tell us a story. Speak with passion and it will transfer to us.
- DON'T talk down to us. What we don't know, we will ask about. However, DO present your material in a way that is not overly technical. There is no need to dumb it down, just realize we might not have your level of expertise on the subject.
- DON'T be too dramatic. Yes, the situation is tough, but who wants to listen about disaster all the time? However, DO talk to us seriously about the extent of the problem, give us the facts without distortion.

Groups like Algalita and 5Gyres are making huge strides towards enabling youth leaders with their Plastic Pollution Youth summit, which I attended last March. During this event, I, along with a number of teams from around the world were trained to speak and do community organizing.

Because, to inspire youth is, given time, to change the world.