



A Savvy Social Media Influencer Strikes For Our Future

David Wicker

Italy

David Wicker remembers as a child playing in hip deep snow in the foothills of the Alps near Turin, Italy. Now the 15 year old is worried, "This year, it didn't snow even once," he explains, "Winters hover around 25 C (77 F), which is just hard to comprehend."

Born in the countryside outside Turin, David grew up with rivers running through lovely farmlands, and views of the snowcapped Alps. His rural upbringing gave him a deep sense of responsibility for protecting its natural beauty. Agricultural regions like his in Northern Italy are suffering some of the greatest negative impacts of climate change. "With the reduced snowpack, we are susceptible to droughts," he says, "We're facing serious situations, especially in our agricultural areas."

Northern Italy's farms are famous for producing the luscious tomatoes used in its tasty pasta sauces and pizzas. In the next few decades, this whole region is at risk of having a sustainable source of drinking water. "50 percent of the ice is already gone from the glaciers in the Alps. And 70 percent of that 50 percent has thawed in just the last 10 years. If this keeps up at this pace we won't have a reliable source of water in the future. And the North is the most populated region of Italy. It's a scary thing to consider."

In high school, David had learned about climate change. So he was shocked to see that Italy's leaders weren't doing anything about it. That's when he started looking for youth leaders, who were changemakers in their countries.

"I saw Greta's speech to the European Parliament, and I thought, this girl my age is speaking in front of all of our European leaders. I was so inspired. I immediately started learning about #FridaysForFuture. Then one day I said, okay, let's try it!"

For the first Friday event David's parents didn't allow him to attend. "You're not skipping school to go on the street with some strangers," they said. "In the beginning, they weren't so sure about what I was doing," David explains. "They thought I was wasting my time - instead of studying and pursuing hobbies." But after they saw his dedication, they changed their minds. "By the second week, I was able to convince them," he says. "Now they are both a part of #ParentsForFuture, the parents' side of the movement."

A few weeks later as David marched down the streets of old Turin, he was amazed to see the gathering masses of people. His #FridaysForFuture group had chosen Piazza Vittorio as their meeting spot. Turin's largest piazza, it can hold 100,000 people. Suddenly, their forward progress was stopped in its tracks. "We struggled to get past all the people," David says. "It was full by the time we arrived. I couldn't believe it!"

On the way, their march was stopped again by an energetic group of young people: for a moment, it was a somewhat tense situation. But quickly, David realized that they were not being slowed down by detractors, but by a swelling crowd of unexpected supporters - tens of thousands of them. No one, including himself, could believe so many people had gathered to support this cause.

"When we arrived, the entire plaza was filled up, just like the streets. Can you imagine? To think that we were able to achieve that much support, and raise that much awareness. We were just a group of 30 young people or so, and we had brought 150,000 people into the streets of Turin, in solidarity with our cause."

What David's success story really proves is the power that tech-savvy youth can have in the environmental conversation. David is a programmer and skillful social media campaigner, both skills that have enormous potential for any movement trying to gain traction in the internet age. Particularly when they have the underlying support of innovative organizations like #FridaysForFuture.

From his position as a savvy social media influencer, David joined with other youth leaders is creating a global awakening to our climate emergency. These dynamic youth leaders immersed in technology are reaching out with this urgent message--and coming together to wake us all up. Thanks to young leaders like David, Greta, and other youth leaders around the world carrying the #FridaysForFuture banner, the school strike movement spread out across the globe, reaching tens of millions for the Global Strike on September 20, 2019.

Shortly after, in November 2019, Italy became the very first country to require all students to learn about climate change. "It's about time," David says. "It's a start. Once young people learn, we can get them to take action."

For youth who want to get involved in a climate cause, David has some suggestions to help them navigate the obstacles they will surely face. "I think it's important to send a message that they should never give up the fight. When you're in a movement like this, and the message is critical, it can be very stressful. It's common among activists to experience an overwhelming sense of wanting to give up. I myself have had many moments of frustration where I've thought, 'Nobody cares about the climate emergency. The politicians don't care. I should just give up.' But it's in these moments most of all when we must support one another. The future can only be saved in the present. Coming together as a supportive community is the most effective way forward."

In fact it's the urgency of the climate situation that can often be the hardest thing to get across to other young people. "It's fundamental that we start acting now. But our institutions are lagging. So it's important for us to keep up the pressure, and introduce new levels of awareness to those in charge who aren't acting, or who don't feel the urgency of the situation that we do."

David is also setting his sights on bridging the knowledge and priorities gaps between generations in this community. "The older generations pioneered the climate movement in Italy, so there is much to learn from them. But there are also a lot of new and exciting ideas coming from the youth movements - and urgency is the most visible. A lot of older people haven't thought about the climate crisis the way we have. They don't think this situation is going to affect them as immediately as we believe it is going to - but in fact, older people can be more susceptible to the immediate effects of climate change in many ways. David fears for their future, "Older people are really more susceptible to the effects of climate change. This year alone, because of the heat waves, Turin had more than 4,000 deaths. Most of the people who were affected by the heat are older people. It really shows how our climate emergency affects everyone; so we should come together across groups to fight this battle."

David also thinks it's essential to educate the older community about the connection between climate action and social justice, which is central to making a positive change. "It's up to us as youth, who are more versed in these things, to clarify a major component of our activism: climate justice doesn't mean anything without social justice. If we don't recognize that by now, then we have already failed," He pauses, then adds, "It's not a fight between us and somebody else. It should be an effort fought by all humanity together. For our own survival. Lifting up one group, or race, or demographic, doesn't mean we are making an enemy of the others. That sort of thinking must be left in the past. It's not productive at all. Helping anyone is helping everyone. Together is the only way through this climate emergency; together to a brighter future."

From his position as a savvy social media influencer, David is creating a global awakening to our climate emergency - especially among youth. The more dynamic youth leaders we have immersed in technology, the more rapidly we can increase the reach of this urgent message--and through coming together find better solutions.

You never change things by fighting the existing reality. To change something, build a new model that makes the existing model obsolete.

Buckminster Fuller

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