One reason people avoid thinking about climate change, or try to pretend it’s not happening, is that they feel powerless to address the problem. It’s true that anything we can individually do is minuscule compared with the scope of the problem. But individual efforts really do add up. People usually think first about how to reduce their own carbon emissions. I’ll discuss that first. But climate change is a collective problem, and requires a collective response. So it’s also important for people to contribute to collective solutions, even if only in a small way.

Simple, Easy Individual Actions.

Berkeley has a climate calculator that can help you figure out your current carbon footprint and how to reduce it. To get you started, here are some small but significant first steps you could take. None of them are drastic or painful. People’s psychology differs, but my theory is that it’s best to start with relatively small, easy steps. Faced with the choice between a major lifestyle change or doing nothing, many people will opt for doing nothing. And small steps do make a real difference.

1. **Stop idling your car.** Modern cars don’t need to idle before they’re driven, even in winter. You can also save gas by turning off the engine any time you’re stopped for more than ten seconds. Idling engines are also significant contributors to air pollution. EDF estimates that in New York City alone, idling results in over a hundred thousand tons of carbon emissions each year.
2. **Tweak your thermostat**. Turning your thermostat up a couple of degrees in summer and down the same amount in winter doesn’t affect the comfort level much, and can help cut emissions significantly. One source I saw estimated that this could save around a ton of carbon a year. Obviously, the amount would depend on a lot of factors, including the energy source for your heating system and whether your local grid relies on coal.
3. **Eat a little less meat.** Even small changes can be helpful. A study reported in the NY Times found that, “if everyone in the country reduced their consumption of beef, pork, and poultry by a quarter and substituted plant proteins, we’d save about 82 million metric tons of greenhouse gas emissions per year.” It probably wouldn’t hurt your health any either. Even switching from beef to pork or chicken is an improvement.
4. **Energy efficiency.** The carbon benefits of getting a more fuel efficient car are obvious. But appliances use more energy than you think. According to one estimate, you can save about 700 pounds of carbon a year with an energy efficient refrigerator. If you still have any old-fashioned light bulbs in use, replace them. All of these steps are good for the environment and actually

save you money.

5. **Carbon mindfulness.** One final piece of advice: keep carbon emissions in mind in everyday activities. If you can eliminate one trip a week in the car, pick a store closer to home, install some LED lights to replace incandescent bulbs, or shorten your shower by a few minutes, that adds up. And actually, those things will also save you money.

Simple, Easy Collective Efforts

Government action is crucial to addressing climate change. But how can we, as individuals, help move public policy? Again, I'm going to suggest some quick and easy steps, rather than quitting your job and becoming a full-time climate activist.

1. **Social media.** If you're a social media user, try to give some attention to climate change. That can take the form of posting some of your own comments or giving links to articles by others (including material from *Legal Planet* of course!). If you use email but not social media, trying sending your friends links to interesting articles. Or post comments about climate issues on websites (again including this one). We need to mobilize public opinion, and grass roots efforts matter.
2. **Financial contributions.** One of the lessons from recent politics is that small donations are important. There are many organizations doing great work on climate change. That includes all of the major environmental organizations, as well as organizations focused specifically on climate change. And of course, there are also university-based programs, like the UCLA and Berkeley environmental law centers that sponsor Legal Planet. Give $25 if you can't afford more; if you can't afford that, give $5.
3. **Vote!** The simplest way to have an effect is to vote in presidential races, state races, local elections, and primaries. Your vote matters. If you're in doubt about that, remember the 2000 election when a few hundred votes in Florida made the differences between having climate crusader Al Gore and oilman George Bush in the White House.
4. **Write/email Congress.** Members of Congress pay attention to correspondence from constituents. Contact them to let them know what you think about climate change. You can find easy step-by-step directions on emailing or mailing Congress at https://www.wikihow.com/Email-Congress#Emailing-a-Member-of-the-U.S.-House-of-Representatives_sub, starting with how to find who represents you in about ten seconds. Just messaging Congress once a year can make a

difference. Even if your representative has a strong position in the issue, writing them can affect how much they prioritize it.

Yes, none of the things you can do will solve the problem. But remember, the Great Barrier reef, which is over a thousand miles long, was built by millions of tiny individual polyps. If we’re going to have any chance to save the reef from climate change, it’s going to take the efforts of millions of us. But if they can do it, we can do it. After all, we’re smarter than coral polyps, aren’t we?