Navigating the Science-Social Media Space: Pitfalls and Opportunities

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“… developing a corps of highly visible and socially engaged scientific leaders.”
Why are scientists uneasy using social media?

1) discomfort/stigma associated with (non-traditional) self-promotion

   “Shouldn’t the quality of my science speak for itself?”
   “Aren’t rigor and ‘flash’ anti-correlated?”

2) danger of over-selling societal relevance of results

3) danger of over-simplifying results to the point of inaccuracy

4) fear of the scientist as advocate, loss of objective image

5) who has the time anyway?*
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Highly Variable El Niño–Southern Oscillation Throughout the Holocene

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The El Niño–Southern Oscillation (ENSO) drives large changes in global climate patterns from year to year, yet its sensitivity to continued anthropogenic greenhouse forcing is uncertain. We analyzed fossil coral reconstructions of ENSO spanning the past 7000 years from the Northern Line Islands, located near the center of action for ENSO. The corals document highly variable ENSO activity, with no evidence for a systematic trend in ENSO variance, which is contrary to some models that exhibit a response to insolation forcing over the same period. Twentieth-century ENSO variance is significantly higher than average fossil coral ENSO variance but is not unprecedented. Our results suggest that forced changes in ENSO, whether natural or anthropogenic, may be difficult to detect against a background of large internal variability.
Why I have embraced social media

I think climate science should have more impact in the public sphere.

I want to be accessible (literally and figuratively).

I can tell some great stories, and I have some great photos.

I want to help change the culture of science regarding:
1. public engagement w/ climate change
2. women in science
But I'm getting ahead of myself, as my visit to Capitol Hill started in seat 21B of my flight up to DC, with Congressman Sanford Bishop (D-GA) in seat 21C, and my 2-year-old daughter Sasha in seat 21A. One has to appreciate the irony here: I'm flying up to DC to meet with a legion of Congressional staffers in the faint hope that one of them may put my name under their boss' nose for 2 seconds, and as it turns out a real-life Congressman is literally forced to sit down next to me for 2+ hours! Of course having my 2-yr-old there provided comic relief, spilled milk, kicked seats, and spurred a sharing of stories about kids/grandkids (he has a 5-yr-old granddaughter and I have a 5-yr-old daughter). I think our conversation started when I asked him for one of his napkins in response to the first of many liquid spills. Once we realized we could actually have a substantive, if not interrupted, conversation, we gabbed on for the rest of the flight. He started with some probing questions about my thoughts on whether climate is best
My most successful posts

are personal

use humor

tell a story

photos, photos, and more photos

use matter-of-fact, but measured messages
to avoid pervasive polarization and encourage dialogue
It doesn’t matter how right you are, if nobody is listening to you.