

Vystopia

Relationship-Based Advocacy: A Resource Guide

Inspired by Clare Mann

This resource guide is drawn from Clare Mann's series with The Vegan Community, titled *Vystopia: Enemy or Hidden Asset?*

Clare Mann is a vegan psychologist, author, and long-time advocate who has helped countless people navigate the grief and isolation that can arise when we awaken to animal suffering. Rather than relying on confrontation or debate, Clare emphasizes **relationship-based advocacy**, a way of engaging others that is playful, curious, and deeply respectful. Through her stories and strategies, she shows how we can plant seeds, nurture curiosity, and embody loving kindness in our daily interactions. This guide distills those lessons so that vegans and advocates can shine their light more freely, helping others feel safe, heard, and open to change.

Core Philosophy

- **Advocacy is about relationships, not arguments.**
People rarely change based on facts alone, especially on moral issues. What lingers is how you make them *feel*.
 - **Plant seeds, don't push conversions.**
Your role may simply be planting an idea; others may water and nurture it later.
 - **Approach with lightness, play, and curiosity.**
Defensiveness shuts people down, but curiosity opens them up.
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Principles of Relationship-Based Advocacy

a. Grounded Presence

- Stay calm, rooted, and self-mastered.
- If you are defensive or anxious, the conversation closes; if you are grounded, people sense your freedom.
- Example: Clare responds playfully at the bus stop, disarming judgment about “bossy vegans” by joking along and then gently reframing.



Playfulness & Disarming Conversations.



Clare shares how she sometimes responds when strangers ask if she's vegan, especially in casual settings like bus stops or markets. Instead of going defensive, she uses humor to break down stereotypes.

“Are you a Vegan? I don't know. Am I a Vegan? What's one of those? I've actually said before, oh goodness me, I hope not. Those Vegans, I said. They're always telling people what to do, aren't they? ... Have I told you what to do? Am I one of those people?”



Takeaway: By being lighthearted, Clare avoids confrontation and invites curiosity.

b. Playfulness and Curiosity

- Humor and light-heartedness lower walls.
- “Am I vegan? Oh goodness, I hope not — they're always telling people what to do, aren't they?” → Creates reflection without confrontation.
- People lean in when advocacy feels like *shared discovery*, not a lecture.

c. Reframing Veganism

- Define veganism as **loving kindness**: toward self, others, animals, and ecosystems (credit to Will Tuttle).
- Show how acts of kindness at a market, in the community, or in gardening can be expressions of vegan values.
- Ask questions that invite curiosity: “Depends what you mean by vegan...”



Redefining Veganism Beyond Diet.

At a farmers' market in Queensland, Clare noticed a stall proudly labeled "I love Vegan." When her neighbor asked if she was vegan, she used the moment to broaden the conversation beyond food choices.

"Actually, it depends what you mean by 'vegan'... I see it as a philosophy of loving kindness towards ourselves, other people, other animals, and towards ecosystems."

She then pointed out how community, care, and creativity at the market were expressions of vegan values — contrasted with the selling of animal products nearby.

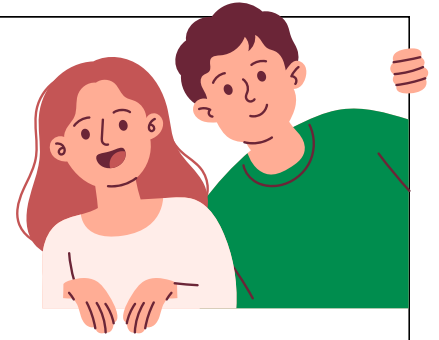
"So as I look around [the market] ... people are providing beautiful fruits and vegetables ... helping each other out. That is an act of Veganism. But then I look over there and I see what's being served... How can that be an act of loving kindness when we've taken away the lives of animals...?"



Takeaway: Clare reframes veganism as a positive philosophy, not a restriction.

d. Shining Your Light

- Advocacy is less about persuasion, more about *embodying joy, hope, and compassion.*
- People say: *"I want what you've got."* That curiosity becomes the entry point.



Change Comes from How We Make People Feel

Clare shares a story about a wealthy man who bought a massive diamond, thinking it would bring happiness, only to realize what he really wanted was the giver's generosity.

"People rarely change on facts alone... particularly on moral issues. They don't. But it's how we make them feel. And if they look at us and go, 'I want what that person has' – that makes the difference."



Takeaway: The spirit we carry – joy, kindness, curiosity – can influence people more than arguments.

Techniques and Strategies

- **Fan the embers.** See everyone as a “pre-vegan” – your role is to keep their potential for compassion alive.
- **Redefine labels.** Shift “vegan” from a diet to a way of being.
- **Use stories** like the “diamond story,” where what people really want isn't the object, but the *spirit* of generosity behind it.
- **Allow silence and unseen reactions.** Not all impact is visible; people may be deeply affected even if they don't respond outwardly.
- **Stay light when challenged.** A defensive “yes, I'm vegan” often backfires; instead, lead with curiosity, humor, or philosophy.



Seeing People as “Pre-Vegans”



In discussing how to stay grounded when faced with difficult conversations, Clare suggests adopting a hopeful perspective about others’ potential.

“People are pre-vegans. And actually, our job is to fan those embers, to help them be pro-vegan – pro being a world of loving kindness.”



Takeaway: Instead of labelling people as “non-vegans,” Clare sees them as future allies, which shifts the mindset from frustration to encouragement.

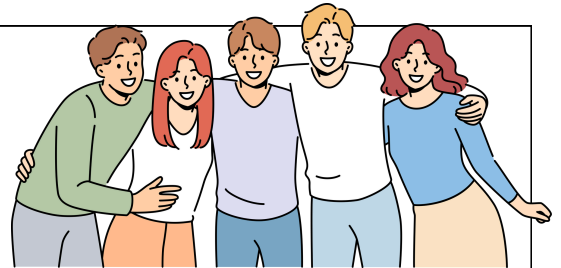
Common Pitfalls to Avoid

- Trying to convert on the spot.
- Overloading people with facts when they’re not ready.
- Shaming, blaming, or moral superiority.
- Mistaking silence for indifference — people may be processing privately.

The Bigger Picture

- Relationship-based advocacy creates *ripples*. Your energy and presence can spark change far beyond what you see.
- Community, storytelling, and kindness sustain the movement.

- Wisdom-holders – especially elders who remember thrift, community gardens, and neighborly care – have a vital role in modeling what’s possible.



✦ Key Takeaway:

Effective advocacy is less about “winning” arguments and more about embodying the change you wish to see. When people feel hope, joy, and kindness radiating from you, they naturally become curious – and that curiosity is the seed of transformation.



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