

MEETINGS

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Layne Longfellow Heads a List of New Socially Conscious Speakers

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By Jennifer Juergens

Layne Longfellow, a handsome, middle-aged man with neatly combed brown hair, stands on a stage and peers out at his audience. Inside the billowing, white-cloth tent all is quiet, except for the grumbling air conditioners that save the 300 attendees from the grueling Florida heat. The audience sits poised, attentively waiting for him to begin. Longfellow, surveying the crowd, slowly opens up his Bible and cradles it in his hands as he reads from the book of Genesis. His voice is soft and steady. "And God blessed them, and God said unto them, be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the Earth, and subdue it: And have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the Earth."

Longfellow bows his head and remains silent, waiting for the words to sink in. The air conditioners hum. Then, he says softly, "Something must have gotten lost in the translation. We've misinterpreted the term 'dominion' to imply 'control of' or 'license to use', rather than 'to be

responsible for'. We remembered to subdue, we forgot to replenish. This has led to the depletion of resources, pollution, competition with other species, and disruption of the climate."

The audience remains still. This modern-day Moses has this group of managers and customers of E.I. Du Pont de Nemours, one of the world's largest chemical companies - and one of the country's biggest air polluters - stunned.



Dr. Layne Longfellow pioneered general-audiences talks on climate change in 1989

But Longfellow is not here to chastise.

"No shame. No blame. No guilt. We did what we thought was best with what we knew. Now we know more, so let's get on with it. America has lived in a world of privilege at an enormous cost to the environment. Now is America's greatest opportunity for moral leadership."

Longfellow walks to a grand piano at the corner of the stage. "Here's our chance to save the world and give back," he says as he sits down to play. Above the haunting melody he recites a poem that he has written for the occasion:

"Someday these will be the old days,
The hand-me-down time our children have to wear.
Children are letters to new worlds,
Worlds we will never see."
The audience stares at him in hushed, introspective silence.

Layne Longfellow is one of the growing ranks of socially conscious speakers whose views are in demand by corporations and associations these days. He gives about 50 speeches a year on a range of topics-from the environment, to ethics, to societal and personal values. And the requests for Longfellow, and others like him, are growing.

