"Climate change" used to be widely known as "global warming." But that began to shift in 2002 when the political consultant, wrote a memo to President Bush, "Memo exposes Bush’s new green strategy."

In the memo, Luntz noted that the scientific debate about global warming was "closing but not yet closed." He then advised: "Voters believe that there is no consensus about global warming within the scientific community. … Therefore, you need to continue to make the lack of scientific certainty a connotations attached" while climate change is "less frightening."
Politics aside, Luntz's memo is one of the most stellar PR accomplishments of recent years. For example, the Guardian article also notes that while the phrase "global warming" appeared frequently in Bush's speeches in 2001, it surfaced far less often in subsequent years. Today, all of the major print and television news sources routinely use the phrase, and Wikipedia has an entry on "Climate Change Denial" (along with one on the global warming controversy).

More impressive is that "climate change" has been adopted by people who probably think it is deceptive. So the Issues section of Hillary Clinton's website includes an entry on climate change, the Bernie Sanders campaign only a few days ago posted a news release discussing the topic, and the Democratic Party website encourages supporters to "act on climate." The term even has been adopted by Earth First, an environmental group considered so radical that most wildlife refuse to join it.

Luntz's other PR feat is that he helped distract people from the fact that global warming and climate change are not the same thing. As NASA notes on its website, the terms "are often used interchangeably but have distinct meanings."

Global warming, NASA says, references the long-term warming of the planet. "Climate change" encompasses global warming but includes other distractions such as "rising sea levels, shrinking mountain glaciers, accelerating ice melt in Greenland, Antarctica and the Arctic, and shifts in flower/plant blooming times."

What a bunch of Debbie Downers. For more depressing information, you can visit NASA's Climate Kids website. Depending on your perspective, the site either is an easy-to-comprehend effort to honestly explain a complex and serious issue, or an elaborate government attempt to manipulate and corrupt our children.

Today, Luntz is ambivalent about his infamous memo. He acknowledges that humans have contributed to global warming but maintains that because the science at the time was incomplete, his recommendation was appropriate. He also says he is not responsible for how the Bush administration chose to use his advice.

Perhaps most interesting, he believes his work has been a failure. In a 2010 interview, he noted that regardless of whether it is called climate change or global warming, "the public believes it’s happening, and they believe that humans are playing a part in it." A man can only do so much.

Luntz remains a polarizing figure, worthy of a column in his own right. People may question whether the planet is warming, but there is no denying the impact of Luntz's work on our discourse. It is a good reminder of the great responsibility PR pros have. Simply through our choice of language, we sometimes can help build awareness of an important issue — or help push it to the back burner.