

TITLE: "THE ART OF PERSUASION"

by Tim Bryce

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Since 1971: *"Software for the finest computer - the Mind"*

Man-1: I came here for a good argument!

Man-2: Ah, no you didn't, you came here for an argument!

Man-1: An argument isn't just contradiction.

Man-2: Well, it CAN be!

Man-1: No it can't! An argument is a connected series of statements intended to establish a proposition.

Man-2: No it isn't!

- Monty Python

INTRODUCTION

This is a subject near and dear to my heart. As a graduate of the College of Communications at Ohio University, I studied interpersonal communications which I found fascinating and has served me well in my business career. Currently, I see very little emphasis on sharpening the speaking skills of students. High Schools typically spend little time in this area, as do the colleges (aside from Communications schools such as OU's). Consequently, we are developing a generation of dysfunctional people in the work place who do not know how to work with other people.

Key to speech is the art of persuasion which is needed in order to lead people, sell ideas or products, conduct negotiations, and to simply argue a point. Instead of calm rhetorical discourse though, I've observed heated arguments in the board room, in the office, and life in general, with personal relationships becoming casualties of such debate. This was very obvious in the last presidential election, as well as in Congress today.

A substantial part of the problem is that people do not grasp the fundamentals of persuasion. To some it comes easily, to others it is difficult to assimilate. First, we have to understand that formulating a persuasive speech is hard work. For example, Winston Churchill was well known for his eloquence as a speaker. But few under-

stood the amount of effort Churchill put into his speeches. He would work late into the night writing and rewriting his talks. It was common for him to carry slips of paper in his coat pocket to jot down notes of key phrases he wanted to use. Further, he would rehearse his speeches time and again until he got the tone and inflection he thought would have the most dramatic effect. To outsiders, Churchill appeared to be a great extemporaneous speaker with flippant quotes and catch phrases; In reality, everything was well rehearsed in advance.

THE THREE CANONS OF SPEECH

Preparations and rehearsals are important, but so is content. To formulate a persuasive speech, the speaker should be cognizant of the three basic modes of speech: Ethos, Pathos, and Logos.

ETHOS

Ethos is simply an appeal based on the character of the speaker. An ethos-driven speech relies on the credibility and reputation of the speaker. Basically, an ethos-based speech says, *"If you trust me, then you will support my point of view."* This is why sponsors are important in persuasion. For example, the reputation of a current or former CEO carries more weight in a board room discussion than a clerk's. This is also why we bow to people with greater experience or have seniority. The only caveat here though, is that if the speaker's integrity is questioned, so is his argument. Further, do not become dependent on using ethos-driven arguments, if you are ever proven wrong, your reputation and credibility will be tarnished.

"A reputation once broken may possibly be repaired, but the world will always keep their eyes on the spot where the crack was."

- Joseph Hall

LOGOS

Logos is an appeal based on logic or reason. Business proposals and corporate reviews are typically logos-driven, as is an academic thesis. Basically, a logos-based argument exhibits geometric characteristics, such as:

If A = B
And B=C
Then A=C

The danger here is developing a weak or convoluted argument which is perceived as either illogical or is

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difficult for the audience to grasp. For example:

Communists are people.
Americans are people.
Therefore, all Americans are Communists.

Logos is vital to the credibility of your argument which should be carefully constructed with basic building blocks of common sense.

Logical discourse is an effective way of communicating your thoughts, but it is important to know your audience when presenting such ideas.

"It is dangerous to be right in matters on which the established authorities are wrong."
- Voltaire

PATHOS

Pathos is an appeal based on emotion. Sales and promotional advertising makes active use of emotional appeal by teasing human desires, particularly greed. The intent is to motivate people to take action. As such, a pathos-driven argument is probably the strongest canon of speech. Even if a logos-based argument is logically sound, it will fall on deaf ears when compared to an ethos-based argument. Motivational speeches are typically ethos-based. Coaches, managers, and political leaders make extensive use of pathos-driven speeches. As an example, consider Franklin Roosevelt's "fireside chats" which assured the American public during the Great Depression and World War II.

The only problem here is that truth is not a requirement for an ethos-based argument. To illustrate, Adolph Hitler was able to motivate the German people to develop a military state, but his discourse was often laced with lies. Also, advertising often substitutes facade for substance and as such, the public should exercise "caveat emptor" (let the buyer beware). Aside from this, pathos is a great way to get your point across.

"Whenever you find humor, you find pathos close by his side"
- Edwin P. Whipple

ALL THREE

Rarely will anyone rely on a single canon of speech. Instead, a good argument makes use of all three to get a point across. Churchill, for example, often relied on his reputation as elder statesman to get his point across, as

well as presenting arguments appealing to logic and emotion. A careful blend of the three canons of speech, spoken at the right time and place can work wonders.

KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE

Critical to all of this is a clear understanding of your audience in terms of their knowledge, intelligence, "hot buttons," moral values, interests, and their place in society. The more you know about your intended audience, the better you can prepare an effective argument. Never forget that you speak to communicate. As such, you must speak at the level of your audience, not above or below it. I seriously doubt you will impress a group of grape pickers using a vernacular picked up at MIT. If you want to persuade people, choose your words carefully.

"Remember not only to say the right thing in the right place, but far more difficult still, to leave unsaid the wrong thing at the tempting moment."
- Benjamin Franklin

THE NEED FOR ORGANIZATION

Finally, organize your argument carefully. I am a big believer of the concept of, "Tell your audience what you are going to tell them; Tell them, then; Tell you what you've told them." A speech with no direction goes nowhere fast. This means you should have an Introduction, a Body, and a Summary to conclude your argument.

CONCLUSION

Obviously, the above discussion is equally applicable to both the written and spoken word. What is important here is that the more we know about the art of persuasion, the better we can devise suitable oratory or text for expressing our argument. To recap the points expressed herein:

1. Know your audience
2. Develop a speech conducive to your audience, using the three canons of speech and with some form of structure.
3. Rehearse

Obviously, situations will arise where you will not be able to effectively prepare a formal speech but, instead, must formulate an argument on the spot. As long as you are cognizant of these elements, you'll be more effective in your discourse.

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More importantly, keep your cool when making your pitch and stay in control. Debate should be tempered so that you do not engage the ire of your audience (unless that is your intent). Viciousness should be left at the door. Be organized, be prepared, and enjoy the ride.

"In a republican nation, whose citizens are to be led by reason and persuasion and not by force, the art of reasoning becomes of first importance"

- Thomas Jefferson

END

About the Author

Tim Bryce is the Managing Director of M. Bryce & Associates (MBA) of Palm Harbor, Florida and has 30 years of experience in the field of Information Resource Management (IRM). He is available for training and consulting on an international basis.

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