

Pitching for new business: Aristotle's Rhetoric

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Rhetoric is the art of persuasive communication. According to Aristotle, three elements are required for effective rhetoric: *ethos* (your reputation), *logos* (the logic in your argument) and *pathos* (the emotion you elicit). All three are a vital triad when presenting for new business.

Ethos: your reputation

Having 10 slides on your wonderful company at the beginning of a presentation comes at a cost. Although it may illustrate your credentials, this is not what they're buying - they're buying you. You are not the company - you represent the company.

We often proudly stand before a map of the world illustrating our global presence, as if that's some source of authority of our personal ability. However, clients are not looking for good global companies; they're looking for good local people. Illustrating the former does not win you the business. Proving the latter does.

Logos: the logic in your argument

Although you may have hard data that clearly supports your argument, people still 'feel' that you have a solid case.

It is a myth that people need to be completely informed - the idea is not to illustrate every single point, but to provide just enough data for your audience to connect the dots. When a presenter shows slide after slide of the figures supporting his/her proposition, I somehow begin to lose faith in them - are they themselves unsure?

You are there to tell a clear story - the data is there to serve as signposts along the way and should never be central to what you say. When the numbers do all the talking, who is speaking for you?

Pathos: the emotion you elicit

Passion is contagious. If you sincerely believe in what you're saying - not blindly so, but based on prudent *logos* from as established *ethos* - then those around you will be inspired also.

Although many facts may be evaluated by clients when making their choice, the final decision always involves emotion. That does not mean an inspired presentation with visual and auditory accoutrements will win the day, but if you think that facts alone are sufficient to persuade, you're in the wrong place: convincing does not take place in the library of the mind, but in

the theatre of the heart.

This is vividly illustrated in an experiment done on donors who were given US\$5 and then given the choice to donate to a worthy cause once they had answered one of two questions:¹

1. If an object travels at five feet per minute, then how far will it travel in 360 seconds?
2. Please write down one word to describe how you feel when you hear the word 'baby'.

The group that was given the first question donated US\$1.26. Those who answered question two gave US\$2.34. Perhaps this is one of those rare occurrences where the numbers do speak for themselves?

Reference:

¹*Bernard Ross and Clare Segal. The Influential Fundraiser. Using the psychology of persuasion to achieve outstanding results. Jossey-Bass/Wiley 2009.*

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