

CHAPTER 1

The Secret of Persuasion

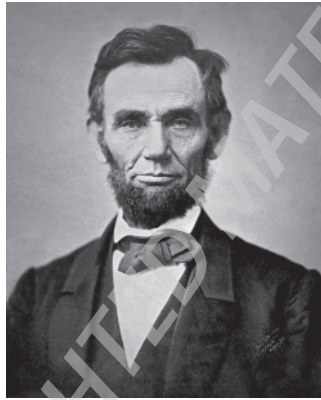


FIGURE 1.1 Abraham Lincoln

Source: Historical photo from Wikimedia Commons, courtesy of Library of Congress, taken by Alexander Gardner.

Do I not destroy my enemies when I make them my friends?

—ABRAHAM LINCOLN (FIGURE 1.1)

On December 14, 1863, Ohio Congressman James Ashley opened more than a few eyes in the House of Representatives by introducing one of the most controversial constitutional amendments in history. Missouri Senator John Brooks Henderson brought the amendment to the Senate floor on January 11, 1864. Three months later, the Republican-majority Senate approved the Thirteenth Amendment to abolish slavery, but the Democrat-controlled House blocked the final passage. On June 15, 1864, the amendment failed to pass by a mere 13 votes.

During the heated summer of 1864, bloody battles pitted brother against brother on dusty fields across a dozen states. Convinced that final passage of the amendment might eventually heal a divided country, President Abraham Lincoln became impassioned to push it through. During his campaign, he called for the “utter and complete extirpation” of slavery as “a fitting, and necessary conclusion” to the war.

After winning the election, Lincoln kept his promise and petitioned for the passage of the Thirteenth Amendment. In December 1864, as part of his annual message to legislators, Lincoln made it clear that he would not wait until the March 1865 congressional inauguration, but intended to fight for immediate passage. He wrote, “The next Congress will pass the measure if this does not. May we not agree that the sooner the better?”

House Democrats stonewalled. Backed into a corner, Lincoln faced a difficult, uphill battle. What did he do? Did he stand on a podium and berate all the dissenters for being malicious, injudicious, or un-American? Did he blame them for all the perils of the world, or for potentially prolonging a costly and devastating war? Did he divide the country further by conceding defeat because winning was impossible?

He did none of these things. Instead, he gave the world a lasting and inspirational example of leadership. He climbed into his carriage and rode to the homes of every “fence-sitting” Democrat. He spent long hours negotiating, pleading, and most importantly, persuading his opponents. He reached across the acrimonious aisle and twisted intransigent arms and negotiated difficult deals.

He did whatever it took to win their minds and hearts.

Some historians argue that he gave away too much or used shady tactics. While it’s true that patronage jobs were offered to some Democrats in exchange for breaking ranks, and purists may be correct in calling this move a bit shady, it is also true that Lincoln did not compromise his core principles or resort to illegal or immoral tactics. He did what all true and great leaders must do: He brought to bear an equal measure of compromise and courage to ensure a greater good.

On January 31, 1865, a nervous Lincoln paced the floor as the world awaited the outcome. The Confederates were on the brink of defeat, and the Republicans thought this might sway several “swing” Democrats from voting in favor of the amendment. A hushed silence swept across the floor of the chamber as House of Representatives Speaker Schuyler

Colfax stepped to the podium. He cleared his throat and said, “On the passage of the joint resolution to amend the Constitution of the United States, the ayes have 119, the noes 56.”

Lincoln exhaled a sigh of relief. The Thirteenth Amendment had passed by a narrow margin. The president had succeeded in convincing 16 Democrats to join all the Republicans in voting in favor of the measure. The rules of parliament were temporarily overlooked to allow a throng of congressmen to cheer and “weep like children.” One great leader, led by a heart filled with passion and purpose, had persuaded 16 minds and hearts to do the right thing. How had this one man changed the course of history?

By understanding and applying the art of persuasion.

Great leaders like Abraham Lincoln know that you can never force change. Using coercion or fear to get your way might work temporarily, but the inevitable consequences are usually dismal. To inspire long-term and effective change, leaders must win minds and hearts, which requires advanced skills in persuasion. Contrary to popular belief, this art is not new and has been around for thousands of years. The ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle invented the Persuasion Model, which theorizes that persuading someone requires three primary arguments that appeal to instincts (ethos), emotions (pathos), and logic (logos) (Figure 1.2).

Aristotle developed *The Art of Rhetoric* starting in 367 BC, which detailed his triangle of persuasive arguments. Today, top speakers and leaders incorporate these principles into their speeches or approaches to persuade and inspire audiences and followers.

One corner of Aristotle’s triangle, which he called *Pathos*, is defined as a “pathetic appeal.” From an emotional perspective, Pathos relates to feelings, suffering, pain, or calamity. Linguistic derivatives of Pathos include empathy, sympathy, and apathy. The goal of the speaker or leader is to appeal to heartstrings and create a shared emotional bond or connection.

Top leaders use a rhetorical approach called enumeration, which is strengthened by making an emotional appeal three times in succession while using three related but different examples. The speaker or leader seeks to trigger key audience emotions that can set up subsequent calls to action, which might be to take out your wallet or approve a purchase order.

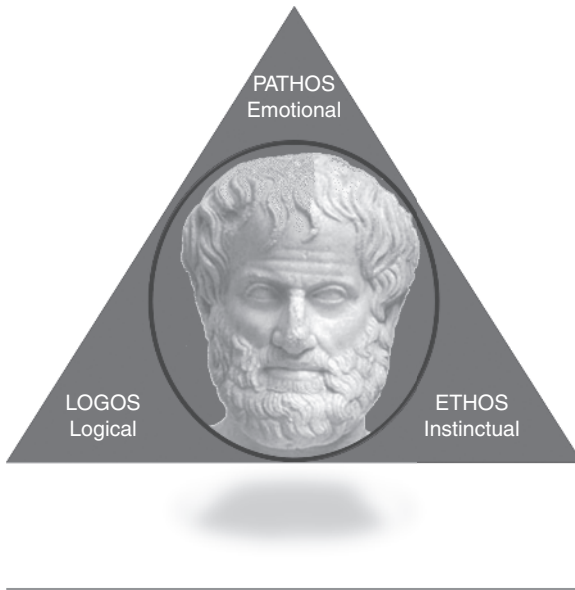


FIGURE 1.2 Aristotle Pyramid

Source: Graphic created by author. Aristotle (384–322 BC). Bust White photo is from Wikimedia Commons, attributed to jlorenz1.

Aristotle recommended seven positive emotions as compared to their contrasting negative emotions to accomplish this goal:

1. Calmness vs. Anger
2. Friendship vs. Enmity
3. Confidence vs. Fear
4. Shamelessness vs. Shame
5. Kindness vs. Unkindness
6. Pity vs. Indignation
7. Emulation vs. Envy

When employed properly and passionately, with the right motives and intent, Aristotle's Pathos moves an audience to feel what the speaker or leader feels, which in turn creates a bond similar to what one might feel for a close friend or loved one. People want to follow people they trust and like. The right emotional appeal allows us to connect with others and lay a solid foundation for the second mode of persuasion.

When you step onto the stage, whether in front of your team, a large audience, or a single person, it's critical to connect emotionally, which is Pathos. Once this has been accomplished as noted above, you then need to build credibility and trust, which Aristotle called *Ethos*. The best way to do this is to appeal to someone's instinctual drivers. As humans, we are wired to avoid fear, harm, or pain. By informing our audience about a potential risk or action that could cause them harm, we can gain their trust. We must do this honestly and factually by researching our topic.

Aristotle used three additional terms to define his views about Ethos. *Phronesis* means good sense. When we communicate, it should be relevant, tasteful, and appeal to our audience's good senses.

Arête stands for good moral character. By showing our honest vulnerability, authenticity, and true heart, we allow our audience to see our *arête*.

Finally, *eunoia* refers to goodwill. Our audience needs to sense that our intentions are selfless and that our honest goal is to be helpful by informing them about something important, such as a pending calamity or consequence.

The third leg of Aristotle's persuasion triangle is *Logos*. This is where we make a logical argument supported by facts, figures, numbers, validation, case studies, evidence, and reason. There are two types of arguments that ensure we are properly delivering Logos: deductive and inductive.

Deductive reasons, or arguments, are generally based on specific premises, delivered in small steps, that are true. If one small premise is true, then the next, which builds upon the first, must also be true, and therefore the logical conclusion must be valid. Socrates also used this approach by effectively gaining agreement for a small truth and then using that as a steppingstone for the next one. For example, we might say:

Do you agree that the sun will come up in the east tomorrow morning?

Yes, of course I do.

And that it will set in the west in the evening?

Yes, absolutely.

And do so again for the next 365 days?

Yes, without question.

And continue for all the years of your life?

Yes, for the rest of my life.

And that someday, for all of us, we will not witness this event once we're gone?

Yes, sadly that is true.

And you have no idea when that day may come, correct?

Yes, I have no idea when that will be.

Therefore, it's important to ensure that the family you leave behind is taken care of, yes?

Yes, very important.

Then wouldn't you agree that it's vitally important to have adequate life insurance?

After having said "yes" seven times to small unarguable truths, it's almost impossible for someone to then say "no" to question number eight.

Inductive reasoning, where the premises are not certain but offer strong evidence to support the truth, can also be used to invoke Logos. One application of this uses reverse psychology, and it can be a powerful technique to encourage someone to "sell themselves." As an example, a clever salesperson with a gleaming smile might say to a prospect:

"Are you working with anyone to help you solve your issues, John?"

"Yes, Linda, I contacted another vendor and they're researching answers now."

"Did they inform you of the consequences of deploying an inadequate solution that does not offer a whizzle stick umptifrats?"

"No, they didn't."

"That's very concerning, John. Without a whizzle stick umptifrats you could fry your whittle-me-rig. Even so, if you're happy with the other vendor, then you probably would not entertain a second opinion at this point. I hope I've at least been of some help and

would be happy to answer any questions you might have in the future.”

“Well, I haven’t pulled the trigger with them yet, Linda. Tell me more about this whizzle stick umpti-whatever.”

In this example, by offering a morsel of information that included strong evidence of truth, Linda used inductive reasoning to pique curiosity and then politely refused to satisfy the interest. She then used reverse psychology to “close” John by stating that he probably would not be interested.

Like many ancient Greeks, absent HBO® and Showtime®, Aristotle had a lot of time on his hands to conduct observational science to create his Persuasion Model. He studied how humans act and react and are persuaded through speech and action. He obviously had no idea that, more than 2,000 years later, modern neuroscientists would not only validate his theories but discover *why* they work from a scientific “human brain” standpoint.

