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The Three Legs of Persuasion

The basic points for this article are found from Aristotle's "The Rhetoric." They are what Chris calls the "Three Legs of Persuasion." Together they enable us to fully persuade people.

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If you have heard me talk about leadership at all, you will know that I have a very simple definition of Leadership.

Leadership is simply: Influence. That's it. Simple. When you lead, you influence.

To lead others is to influence them through various means to follow you to your vision of a preferred thought, belief or action.

One of the key ways to do so is to increase your ability to persuade people.

Now, at first glance you may do as many do and think of persuasion as simply a verbal plea or argument (in the positive sense of the word) that seeks to change someone's mind. I want to focus in on what I believe to be a much more well rounded view of persuasion, one that has been around for many hundreds of years, and which, when applied, will increase your ability to persuade others, or influence them.

My basic points for this article are found from Aristotle's "The Rhetoric." They are what I call the *"Three Legs of Persuasion."* Together they enable us to fully persuade people. Miss any of the three legs and it is like trying to sit on a three-legged stool that is missing one leg!
What are the three legs? They are:

Logos, or Logic

Pathos, or Passion

Ethos, or Ethics

Let's start with the two that are most prevalent, Logic and Passion, and end with what I consider to be the most important, Ethics. In order to master the art of persuasion, you must have:

1. Logic. Your vision must make sense to the person who is following you (or the one you are trying to get to follow you!). How is this done?

Vision. Do you have a vision of where it is that you want to go? Do you have the destination in mind? If you want people to follow you, you need to have a vision, an end result that you are targeting.

Clarity. Is the vision clear? Can it be articulated clearly? Is it simple enough to grasp? Does it make sense?

Communication. Can you communicate your vision so that it is understandable and compelling? Do you communicate it regularly so that the logic of it sinks in?

Strategy. The strategy for getting to your destination must be logical for your followers. Does it make sense for them to follow you on the journey of your vision for your organization? A well-thought out strategy for getting to your vision is a must.

2. Passion. People underestimate the principle of passion. Today more than ever, this element of being passionate about your vision is paramount to the idea of persuasion.

As we leave the modern era and move into what sociologists are calling the "post-modern" era, people are going to be persuaded less by logic and reason than they are passion. We live in a video age that uses images and music to move people more than sense and reason. For example, think about how basketball shoes are sold today. The ads don't say, "These shoes are made from the finest rubber and leather and will sustain the shock of x amount of pounds of pressure, etc, etc." No, today

shoes are sold by showing basketball players dribbling the ball to a methodical beat. Image. Passion.

> ***So do we throw out logic? Certainly not, but we understand that the passion we demonstrate is extremely important. Probably more important than logic and increasingly so in the years to come.***

Are you passionate about your vision? Does that come through when you speak about it? Does it come through in the materials that you distribute to support your vision?

People want to know that you are passionate about your vision. If you aren't passionate about it, then why should they be? Your vision must be passionately compelling. After all, you are asking them to put themselves on the line, to give it all to get the group to the vision. It takes a passionate person to move a group toward a vision. And the bigger the vision, the more passion you need to get there!

3. Ethics. This is what I believe to be the most important aspect of these three legs of persuasion. Ethics. Integrity. Character. However you want to say it, people look at you and are constantly judging your character.

> ***You may have tremendous skills. You may have all the logic in the world and passion to fill a sporting arena, but if your followers see a crack in your character, they will run for the hills.***

Now don't get me wrong. I am not talking about mistakes. Followers will allow for mistakes. But they will not allow for poor character.

I know what you must be thinking: Wait a minute. We have all sorts of leaders with poor character - just look at the politicians! A few thoughts on that very good question:

Many of the people we think have poor character have many others (and in a politician's case, they just need 51%) who think their character is fine, or at least sufficient. So for some the question of ethics has been answered, just differently than we would answer it. For example, polls show that most people think that politicians are unethical and corrupt in general. But when polled on their own representative, they answer that that person is just fine, thank you very much.

Secondly, we have seen that very talented leaders are eventually undone by their lack of character, or at least thwarted in their goals of leadership. Let's take Bill Clinton for example. What do we know about him? What would most people agree upon?

For one, he is smart, a Rhode's scholar. For another, he is talented. Still more, he is passionate and driven. He is winsome and gregarious. We also know that he had a few "character problems."

"But he was re-elected," you may point out. True, but he didn't accomplish what he wanted to because he was answering the question of his character all of the time. And beyond that, many people who were big supporters of his ended up realizing that they could have someone else who would provide leadership without the sideshow, and they abandoned him in droves by the end.

To his major detractors, Bill Clinton was an example of a person who lacked the character to lead. To his supporters he has become a caricature of lost opportunity because of the issues of character. Now, I do not intend to turn this article into a discussion of politics, but I use Clinton as an example of how people who are both opposed as well as sympathetic to him and his vision can agree that character questions were his undoing.

Where does this leave us? Hopefully you aren't dealing with the kind of issues we have seen in our political process lately, but you should be asking yourself what your character is like.

Am I honest? Am I who I say I am? Do I do what is right? Am I responsible? Am I the same behind closed doors as I am in public? Am I a person of integrity? These are the most important questions. The way your followers answer them about you will determine to what degree they follow you. Will people follow you if your character is less than stellar? Maybe. But all other things being the same, a strong character will put you over the top.

Logic, passion and ethics are the three legs of persuasion. Become a person with a vision that is logical and well thought out, combine that with a passionate pursuit, and you are well on your way to persuading people and achieving the goal for your organization. The key will be what kind of character you have. If you develop a fine, strong character, with high personal ethics, you will have all three legs of persuasion - and you will become an Extraordinary Leader!

Chris Widener is an example of how anyone can overcome any odds to achieve a successful life and help others achieve the same. Chris has overcome many obstacles... living through his father dying suddenly when he was four, being sent away from his family to live with relatives at age nine and becoming involved with drugs and alcohol by the age of twelve. Chris overcame those obstacles and has for the last ten years worked with some of the most financially successful families in America, helping them to achieve both personally and professionally. Now he can do the same for you!