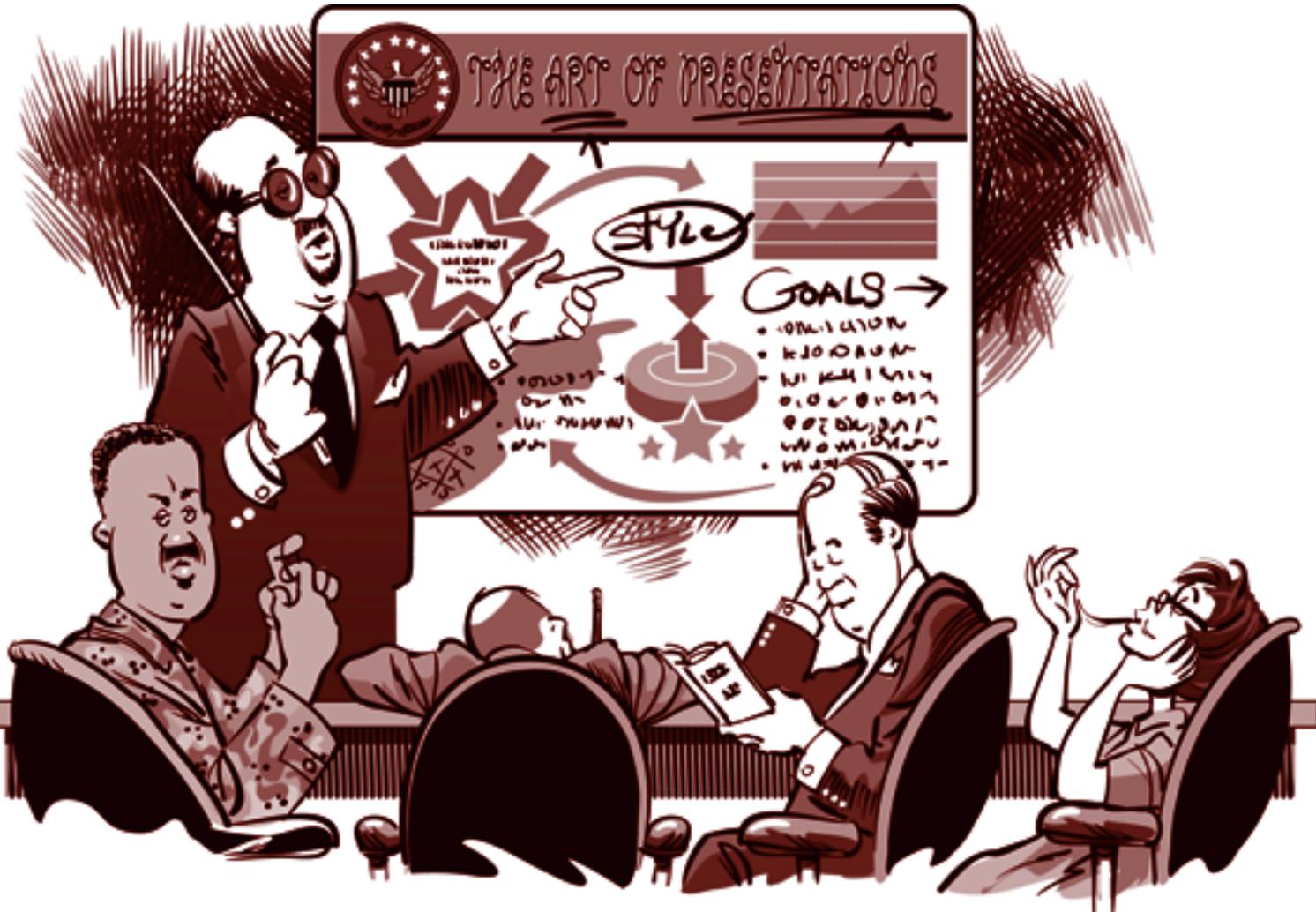


# Aristotle and the Art of Successful Presentations

Matthew Tropicano Jr.



**H**ave you ever listened to a briefing or presentation that was forgettable (or that you wish you could forget)? During a presentation, have you planned your next vacation? Worked through your “To Do” list? Made a shopping list? Faked a yawn or scratched your wrist in order to nonchalantly check your watch? Said to yourself, “Surely he (or she) isn’t going to read the presentation? We *do* know how to read.” Gone cross-eyed trying to decipher a slide with 14 bullet points in 12 point type from the back of the auditorium? Fallen asleep?

*Tropicano is program manager for Naval Sea Systems Command’s acquisition intern programs and Dashboard. He holds a bachelor’s degree in electrical engineering, a master’s in religious studies, and a master’s in business administration. He is a regular contributor to Defense AT&L.*

If you didn’t answer “yes” to at least one, you are very lucky—and very unusual.

## **Ethos, Pathos, Logos**

Many who have been through Toastmasters groups or have taken speaking classes remember the simple basic formula for a good presentation: Tell them what you are going to say; say it; then tell them what you said. It’s a good exercise to go through as you prepare your speech because it works ... to an extent.

However, there is a much more incisive and foundational model, one rooted in history. It is found in Aristotle’s *Art of Rhetoric*, written in 350 B.C.E. Quite simply, Aristotle said that the foundations of good rhetoric must include

attentiveness to the Ethos, Logos, and the Pathos. Let's begin with defining the terms.

- **Ethos** is your personal credibility, the faith people have in your integrity. Ethos is the appeal to your presentation based on your character. Why should the audience listen to you speaking on this topic?
- **Pathos** is the speaker's ability to connect to the audience's feeling; it is the empathetic side. Is the audience brought into the presentation at an emotional level? Are you connecting with the audience at the heart level?
- **Logos** is the substance—the words, the organization, the logic. It is the appeal of your presentation based on reasoning. Is the presentation logical and well-supported?

### **Ethos: Presenting Yourself**

When meeting a person or visiting a place for the first time, you make an assessment in the first few moments. It's usually the initial impression that stays in your mind. How many of us put a book aside if the author hasn't captured our interest in the first 50 pages or so?

It's the same with presentations: The first five minutes are critical because during that time, the audience will decide whether to phase in or phase out.

Ethos is part of helping them to phase in. What is your background related to the subject matter? Is an audience likely to want to hear a presentation about ethics from an Enron executive? Up front, briefly present your background, experience, authority, and credibility as it relates to the subject you are presenting.

### **Pathos: Conveying the Feeling**

Over the course of a couple of years, Raytheon's CEO Bill Swanson wrote principles on loose pieces of paper, which first became a PowerPoint® presentation and then a small book, *The CEO's Secret Handbook*. Eventually Warren Buffet received a copy and liked it so much that he asked for dozens more to give to CEOs he knew, friends, and family. One of the first principles in the small book was this: "You remember a third of what you read, half of what people tell you, but 100 percent of what you feel."

Challenge the audience to *feel* your presentation. When you physically touch someone through a handshake or a hug, there's a measurable transference of electrical energy. In fact even close proximity between two people registers an electrical effect. As a presenter, you have to create the same electricity, touching people mentally since you cannot touch them physically.

Have you ever felt anxious because you were aware of a presenter's nervousness? Embarrassed as you watched someone make a fool of him or herself? Make sure you convey positive emotions to your audience—control of your material and involvement in the issues.

### **Logos: Getting Beyond PowerPoint**

Another principle from *The CEO's Secret Handbook* is "You cannot polish a sneaker." With PowerPoint you can put all kinds of bells and whistles into your presentations and even have bells and whistles for your bells and whistles. But too often, the decorations add up to a presentation that's heavy on style and short on substance or organization. In his April 26, 2002, *Wall Street Journal* article "What's Your Point, Lieutenant? Please, Just Cut to the Pie Charts," Gregg Jaffe quoted a DoD order from the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff: "Enough with the bells and whistles—just get to the point. ... We don't need Venetian blind effects or fancy backdrops. All we need is the information."

A New Yorker cartoon says it another way: It shows the devil saying to one of his workers, "I need someone well versed in the art of torture. Do you know PowerPoint?"

As you are creating your presentation, ask yourself these questions:

- Does this slide enhance my message—elucidate or elaborate upon it? Is PowerPoint helping me to illustrate parts hard to visualize?
- Does this slide present my message clearly and simply, or am I falling for whiz-bang effects that will simply distract my audience?
- Have I crowded so much onto this slide that it can't be read even from the front row?
- Does my presentation as a whole focus my audience's attention?
- Are my slides consistent? (Presentations shouldn't be a hodge-podge of random slides drawn from other presentations.)
- Does my presentation, as a whole, reinforce my verbal message? Does it incite, encourage, and stimulate interest?

### **Presence: Be Yourself**

Ralph Waldo Emerson said, "Your actions speak so loud, I cannot hear what you are saying." Part of presence is presenting your message through your personality with both verbal and non-verbal language. The verbal consists of the words and phraseology, the pace of your delivery, the audibility and clarity of your speech. The non-verbal encompasses just about everything else: your body language, your eyes, your facial expression, your gestures, your emotions, your dress. Together these factors clarify and support your presentation, emphasize and help dramatize your message, make your points more meaningful, and help form and solidify your relationship with the audience.

Part of presence is being yourself. Churchill was not Lincoln who was not Martin Luther King Jr. You don't want folks saying, "He/she sounds just like so-and-so."

## *You're the Judge: The Verdict* (from page 16)

Not only does Ms. Johnson have an ethics problem, but she also violated the law. Instead of finding a supplier with the lowest price or best quality, which would have benefited the government, she selected the supplier that gave her a kickback.

Johnson pleaded guilty to one misdemeanor count of violating 18 U.S.C. 209, unlawfully accepting supplementation of her government salary. She was sentenced to two years of supervised probation, 100 hours of community service, and a \$25.00 special assessment.

### **What the law says:**

18 U.S.C. 209 (Supplementation of Salary) prohibits federal officers or employees from receiving any salary, or contribution to or supplementation of their salary, from private sources as compensation for their services to the executive branch or to an independent agency. It also prohibits the payment of any salary, or contribution to or supplementation of salary, to a federal officer or employee under circumstances where its receipt would be a violation.

This ban on outside compensation for government work is designed to keep outside interests from intruding on the federal government's ability to create and manage its programs independently; and to avoid conflicts between the receipt of such compensation and the employee's duty to make decisions in the public interest, in order to ensure that the employee's sole loyalty is to the government. In other words, it prohibits an executive branch employee from serving two masters by receiving compensation from an outside source to perform official duties.

### **Nerves ...**

If you get nervous, you are not alone. But nervousness isn't all bad.

Nervousness releases adrenaline, increases your heart-beat, and directs your blood flow to your vital organs. The increased body temperature, the increased flow of adrenalin, the increased heart rate, the shallower and faster breathing, the tense muscles are all things that happen to the professional athlete—and they create a force of energy. This force can either empower and infuse you with dynamic energy, or debilitate and devastate you. Think of nervousness as being primed, energized, and mobi-

lized. It's been said that the trick is to get the butterflies to fly in one direction.

### **And Practice**

A man approaches a New York City taxi driver and asks, "How do I get to Carnegie Hall?"

"Practice, practice, practice," replies the taxi driver.

Practice probably doesn't make perfect, but it certainly helps. Don't memorize or you'll sound as if you're giving a canned presentation, but be very familiar with the points you're going to make and the flow of the presentation. Then try it out. And again.

But it's not just a matter of the one presentation. A study conducted at the Weatherhead School of Management of Case Western Reserve University by Professor Jan Wheeler found that the people who wanted to change and develop skills were best served when they practiced their new skills in many venues of their lives. Hence, you need to apply your public speaking skills on all fronts of your life and look for opportunities to speak in front of others.

Toastmasters Inc., an international organization that, in addition to other goals, helps people develop their speaking skills, is an option. It is "the leading movement devoted to making effective oral communication a worldwide reality." The Web site at [www.toastmasters.org](http://www.toastmasters.org) lists clubs based on zip code.

### **Never Underestimate the Power of Words**

According to the ancient Greek adage, "When Demosthenes speaks, the people say, 'My, what a wonderful speaker he is,' but when Pericles speaks, the people say, 'Let us march!'"

When Churchill was granted U.S. citizenship, John Kennedy said, "Winston Churchill mobilized the English language and sent it into battle." And the historian Arnold Toynbee in 1948 concluded that Churchill's wartime speeches spelled the difference between survival and defeat for Britain.

If you apply Aristotle's rules of rhetoric—verifying and testing the Ethos, Pathos, and Logos of your presentation—and if you hone your delivery with practice, you may not make people march, mobilize a language, or save a nation, but you'll make a presentation that states your position with clarity and strength and keeps your audience's attention.

The author welcomes comments and questions.  
Contact him at [matthew.tropiano@navy.mil](mailto:matthew.tropiano@navy.mil).