



## **Lessons From History:**

# **What Aristotle can tell us about writing winning bids.**

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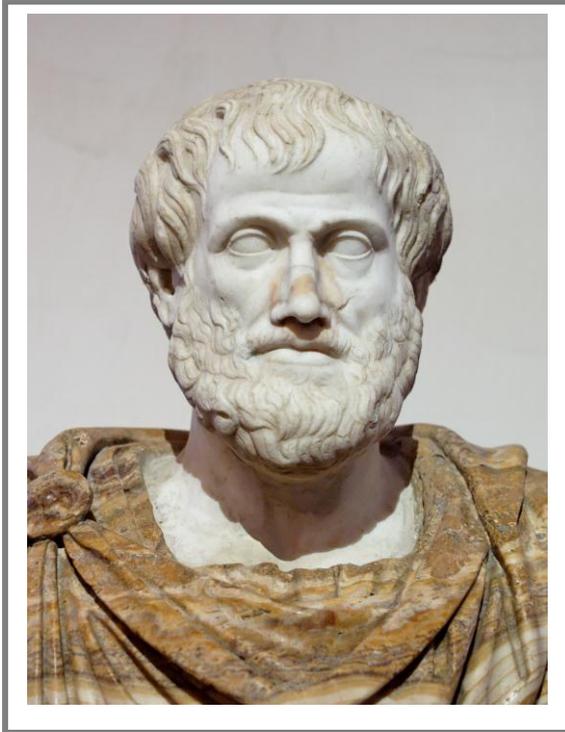
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## Aristotle's Modes of Persuasion and how the principles help us in bid writing



About two thousand years ago, Aristotle wrote *Rhetoric*, a seminal work of philosophy, which analysed the use of language as a tool to develop and deliver a persuasive argument. To this day, his theories are considered to still hold true and the devices he set out influence much of our contemporary communications, including news reports, advertising, political speeches and anywhere the written or spoken word is employed to make a convincing case.

Using incomparable insight, Aristotle defined the technical and aesthetic components of a compelling written or spoken presentation. He discussed how these elements are blended to achieve a conceptual clarity which will leave the reader persuaded by the proposition being put forward. Or, at the least, give the proposal the best chance of persuading us to adopt new ideas and methodologies.

We refer to the basic structure as the 'Modes of Persuasion', which are broken down into three specific lines of thought. They are: ethos, pathos and logos. These devices classify the appeal of language and argument to the reader (or listener).

**Ethos** defines the credibility of the writer or, in the case of a bid, the company making the proposal. The ethos is how well the narrative convinces the reader that the writer is best placed or qualified to be informing us on a specific subject.

For example, if you are going to listen to a speaker deliver a lecture on how to take a free kick in a football match, and that speaker is David Beckham, you will invest a high level of ethos in the speaker because you are familiar with his skills and track record in performing brilliant free kicks. There is a reduced requirement upon him to gain credibility with you first. This is why it is easier to win a bid as an incumbent if you have already provided excellent service and have built a

relationship based integrity and quality. It is also easier to win a bid where you have developed a good rapport through your qualitative approach to business development.

To stretch the footballing analogy, let's assume you are going to the same lecture on taking free kicks but David Beckham is not there. Instead you will be listening to an unknown player who you have never heard of. This speaker first has to first convince you that he truly understands how to take brilliant free kicks. In other words, he will have to work harder to build a level of ethos that equalises his position with David Beckham. This is why it is harder to win a bid where you have no existing relationship or the customer has no pre-existing investment in you.

In Aristotle's view ethos is the primary and most important mode of persuasion. He sub-divided it into:

- **Phronesis** which means common sense
- **Arête** which means good moral character or reputation
- **Eunoia** which means goodwill between parties

Essentially, from a business and bid perspective, the best way to build ethos is to be an acknowledged expert or exponent of the subject matter and by being able to produce bona fide evidence to that effect, preferably from an unimpeachable third party source. Never forget that the first step to producing a winning bid is to clearly, unequivocally and quickly establish your right to be writing about the subject of the proposition.

**Pathos** is the second primary goal of persuasion. Pathos is an appeal to the emotional psyche of the reader. Pathos is the root of words such as empathy and sympathy. Our goal when writing a bid is to establish a high degree of empathy with the reader. We must show them we are walking in their footsteps, that we understand what keeps them awake, that we know the world they want to live in and we know how to help them create it.

Pathos is particularly powerful if used well, but winning bids cannot rely solely on pathos. It must be effectively and seamlessly combined with ethos and logos. Pathos is most effective when the bid author demonstrates agreement with the underlying values of the reader. Occasionally, a writer may also build pathos through playing upon fear, uncertainty and doubt. By using the rhetorical device of 'what if...' negative scenarios, the bid writer can argue that the most desirable positive outcomes for the customer will occur when following the course of action you are proposing. Be warned though, the use of this type of approach is best employed in the hands of experienced bid writers. There is always the chance of introducing concerns that the customer did not previously recognise.

The final element of the modes of persuasion triumvirate is **logos** (logic). This is the appeal to the logical tendencies of the reader or, at least, to stimulate the understanding that a decision cannot be

made by pathos (emotion) alone. Excellent use of logos is generally used to support the pathos. Emotional connections are established and they are then underpinned by rationale and logic. The use of good logical arguments allows the reader to rationalise the emotional investment they have made in your argument.

Douglas Van Praet probably best summarised this in his book *Unconscious Branding: How Neuroscience Can Empower (and Inspire) Marketing*. He said:

*“When our emotional desires begin to shift toward a prospective brand, we align our reasons to be consistent with that intention. Our critical mind is always looking for evidence to support our beliefs. The stronger the emotion, the stronger the belief, and the greater the tendency is to seek out supporting evidence. We are not rational. We are rationalizers. Satisfy the critical mind. If you want people to buy what you’re selling, you have to give them logical permission to buy.”*

In summary, Aristotle has succinctly told us how to construct a winning a winning bid. This approach, will give you a clear line of sight on how to develop your arguments in a way that is proven to be effective. Win peoples’ trust, establish your credibility, demonstrate your empathy with their needs and then deliver logical reasons to buy from you.

Happy Bidding!

**Marcus Eden-Ellis**

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