BYU-Idaho Online Learning
Video Transcript

Mr. Rogers and the Power of Persuasion

[*Video begins and displays the logo of the producer.*]

[*Slow music box playing.*]

Narrator: In 1751, Scottish philosopher David Hume published his masterwork, An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals. In it, he states that you can never change someone's mind in an argument with just reasoning and logic. At first read, that sounded very strange to me, as I'm sure it does to you. But in Hume's view, we are animals primarily motivated and influenced by our intuitions and emotions. The majority of our convictions don't actually come from the rational analysis of facts. As he wrote in 1739, "Reason is, and ought only to be, the slave of the passions, and can never pretend to any other office than to serve and obey them." He, therefore, believed that in an argument, the only way you'll ever change someone's mind is by first speaking to their intuitions and affections.

Haidt, and others—we've discovered that Hume was mostly correct: human reasoning is a servant to intuition.

Haidt: Our minds are pattern matchers that make very quick judgments, within a second usually, and then we recruit our reasoning afterwards to justify what we've just done. So the metaphor I used in my previous book, *The Happiness Hypothesis*, is that the mind is divided into parts, like a rider on an elephant.

[*Video shows a graphic of an elephant displaying: "1. Rider (1%): Conscious Reasoning, Rational, Slow Effortful, Analytical. 2. Elephant (99%): Intuitive, Emotional, Fast and Automatic."*]

The rider is our conscious reasoning. It's pretty small and impotent, but it acts like it's in charge, and the elephant is the other 99% of the mind, which really runs most of our behavior. Most of us spend a lot of our time trying to persuade other people's riders. We give them all these reasons ("here are the seven reasons why you're wrong" or "why you should see it my way") when, in fact, the way to persuade people is to speak to the elephant first.

[*Video displays text: "You always have a good opinion. What do you think of these facts?"*]

The elephant is a lot stronger than the rider. If you get somebody feeling the truth of what you're saying, or feeling that

the elephant doesn't want to go, doesn't want to be dragged along by you to the conclusion that you're trying to get them to, then there's really nothing you can say that will persuade the rider.

Narrator: We're always told that, in arguments, we should have empathy for the other side and speak to their sentiments. And here we see psychologically why that's so important.

[*Video displays text and an image of a brain: "Facts," "Reasoning," "Logic."*]

Reason alone doesn't do the job. As Haidt discovered in his research for his book, *The Righteous Mind*, everyone is convinced of their own rationality, open-mindedness, and enlightenment. It is therefore of the utmost importance to understand one another, instead of using reason to fend off opposing views. The idea that we should speak to people's elephants before their rider is nothing new. It's fundamental to the art of rhetoric and has been for a long time.

[*Video displays the text: "Rhetoric (the art of persuasive speaking)."*]

"The province of rhetoric," wrote Chinese philosopher Confucius, "is about cultivating mutual understanding; about fostering an ever-growing web of interpersonal relationships." But what are the rhetorical tools for cultivating this mutual understanding? And how do we

text: "Ethos (argument by character), Pathos (argument by emotion), Logos (argument by logic)."] To him, a persuasive and effective speaker was someone who could use all three. "Rhetoric," he wrote, "is the faculty of discovering, in any particular case, all of the available means of persuasion." In other words, deciding which of them to use depends on your purpose in the argument, the place and time, and especially the audience. But if you use them all together, and you use them well, they can help you speak to other people's elephants before their rider.

First is ethos, an argument by character, which uses the persuader's personality, reputation, and ability to look trustworthy. Ethos is used in ads all the time to establish credibility.

[*Video displays the text: "Ethos: Credibility. They've won numerous awards."*]

Voice-over: The first luxury brand awarded top safety ratings across its entire model line.

Narrator: It's also used to show the overall virtue of the speaker and their goodwill toward the audience.

[*Video displays the text: "Ethos: Goodwill. JFK won't rush writing legislations. He wants to make sure it's good for all Americans."*]

John F. Kennedy: But today, were I to offer—after little more than a week in office—detailed

was the most important form of persuasion. As one of his contemporaries wrote: "A person's life persuades better than their word." After ethos is pathos, an argument by emotion. It's the appeal to a person or audience's sense of identity, self-interest, and sentiments.

[Video displays the text: "Pathos: Identity/Sentimists Appeal. Provokes sympathy from all parents/Americans. No one wants their kid to face unfair discrimination. All Americans want their kids to be judged by their individual character."]

Martin Luther King: My four little children... will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character. I have a dream today.

Narrator: The most persuasive pathos appeal is humor. A sense of humor calms people down, and it makes you appear to stand above petty disagreements. It's also an ethos enhancer.

[*Video displays the text: "Ethos Enhancer: Humor. Increases Likeability. Establishes Common Ground."*]

Good humor shows you have personality, and it often establishes common ground with an audience. In terms of people's elephants, a laugh is about as intuitive as it gets.

[*Video displays the text: "Pathos: Humor. Triggers joy and comfort.*

never been. *[Laughter]* Well, why don't we eat something, then we'll go and get something to eat. *[Laughter]*

[*Video displays the text: "Logos: Argument by logic. (only needs to be perceived as logical)."*]

Narrator: And finally, there's logos, an argument by logic, which attempts to persuade the audience by making a reasonable claim and offering proof in support of that claim.

[*Video displays text over Green talking: "Logos: Reasoning. 1. Makes claim. 2. Supports w/statistics."*]

John Green: But on average, geography has a huge impact on American health and longevity, like the Eastern Kentucky communities, where life expectancy is under 70, have higher rates of tobacco usage than the central Colorado communities where life expectancy is over 85. But Eastern Kentucky is also poorer and has fewer doctors.

Narrator: This one's a little harder when it comes to people's elephants. Haidt told us that reason alone doesn't work, but there are actually logos tricks to getting people to like and trust you. The most important one is a concession. Concessions are using your opponent's argument to your own advantage. By admitting the validity of a point claimed in their argument, you indicate that you're not only

Concessions are a way for you to give their elephant a little bit so that your counter argument has an easier time getting through to them. Now all this is not to say facts and reasoning aren't important in persuasion. Indeed, it's easy to be sold on a convincing feeling, but that feeling is not always backed up empirically. If you end up in an argument and the other person runs out of logic, it usually means your position is stronger. But if you haven't established either ethos or pathos, and you haven't tried to make concessions or show good humor, then your facts and logic won't matter. You never spoke to their elephant. They will more than likely end up attacking you personally, calling your facts irrelevant, or they'll ignore you. As the best speakers in history—from Cicero to Lincoln to Martin Luther King, Jr.—knew, you need all of the means of persuasion to get people to like and trust you. Used skillfully, they convince your audience that what you're saying feels true, and they'll want to hear your side.

I want to look at an example where these three means of persuasion are used to perfection. In 1969, the late great Fred Rogers known to most as "Mister Rogers" from his children's program on PBS, had a hearing in the Senate. It was one in a series of hearings that were held with the intention of cutting PBS's $20 million budget in half. In the short period of six minutes, Senator Pastore, known by many

had to help children grow into better people, so convincing that he ended up increasing PBS's budget to $22 million. I'm not going to go through the whole thing, but let's look at some key moments and see how the three means of persuasion play into them.

Pastore: All right, Rogers you got the floor.

[*Rogers chuckles*]

[*Video displays the text: "Ethos: Goodwill (Eunoia) and Deep Knowledge of the Subject (Phronesis). Addresses the Senator by name, shows respect for his time, and implies he doesn't need the paper. He can speak from his deep knowledge of the subject."*]

Rogers: Senator Pastore. This is a philosophical statement and would take about ten minutes to read, so I'll not do that. One of the first things that a child learns in a healthy family is trust. And I trust what you have said, that you will read this. It's very important to me, I care deeply about children...

[*Video displays the text: "Logos: Frame. Set the issue on favorable terms. It's not about budget, it's about healthy families and trust – two things Pastore can get behind."*]

[*Video displays the text: "Ethos: Goodwill (Eunoia). It's all about the children. He cares."*]

Narrator: In his intro, Rogers piles on ethos. This makes sense. It's

trust what you have said, that you will read this."]

It equates a healthy family to Rogers' trust in Pastore himself. This frames the discussion between them as a familial one. And you've probably already noticed how calm Rogers is. That's important. Known to be the greatest orator in history, Roman consul Cicero believed that a speaker transforms himself into an emotional role model, showing the audience how it should feel.

[*Video displays the text: "Pathos: Emotional Role Model. Unphased by Pastore's abrasiveness, Roger shows good manners and keeps the room calm."*]

Rogers: My first children's—

Pastore: Will it make you happy if you read it?

Rogers: I'd just like to talk about it, if it's alright.

[*Video displays the text: "Ethos: Credibility (Phronesis). He's been doing this work for a long time."*]

Rogers: My first children's program was on WQED fifteen years ago, and its budget was $30.

[*Video displays the text: "Ethos: Credibility (Phronesis). Large foundations want to keep his program going. He knows how to run a widespread, successful show."*]

Rogers: Now, with the help of the Sears-Roebuck Foundation and

program has a budget of $6,000.

[*Video displays the text: "Pathos: Contrast (Antithesis). Stir emotion: "Look at my educational program (bad funding) vs. ones that are less educational (good funding)!."*]

Rogers: It may sound like quite a difference, but $6,000 pays for less than two minutes of cartoons. Two minutes of animated... what I sometimes say is "bombardment."

[*Video displays the text: "Ethos: Virtue (Shared Values). Common ground. They share the same values: raising good children."*]

Rogers: I'm very much concerned, as I know you are, about what's being delivered to our children in this country.

Narrator: This part's important. He creates more common ground between them. They're both concerned about the well-being of the nation's children. Pastore was once a child, he has a family, and it's his job to represent the needs of Americans as a senator.

[*Video displays the text: "Ethos: Practical Wisdom (Phronesis). He's not just an entertainer. He's studying psychology to make his show more valuable for children."*]

Rogers: And I've worked in the field of child development for six years now, trying to understand the inner needs of children.

[*Video displays the text: "Logos: Proof. Provides evidence that his*

make drama on the screen. We deal with such things as getting a haircut or the feelings about brothers and sisters and the kind of anger that arises in simple family situations. And we speak to it constructively.

Pastore: Could we get a copy of this so that we could see it? Maybe not today, but I'd like to see the program.

Rogers: I'd like very much for you to see it.

Pastore: I'd like to see the program itself, or any one of them, ya see?

[*Video displays the text: "Ethos: Reputation. They've made a lot of shows."*]

Rogers: We made a hundred programs for EEN, the Eastern Educational Network, and then when the money ran out, people in Boston and Pittsburgh, and Chicago all came to the floor and said, "We've got to have more of this neighborhood expression of care."

[*Video displays the text: "Logos: Proof (Anecdote). Tells an anecdote of how important the program is to many different people."*]

Rogers: And this is what. . . this is what I give.

[*Video displays the text: "Pathos: Vivid Description (Enargeia). Makes Pastore feel as if he's with him on his show."*]

There's no person in the whole world like you, and I like you just the way you are." And I feel that if we in public television can only make it clear that feelings are mentionable and manageable, we will have done a great service for mental health. I think that it's much more dramatic that two men could be working out their feelings of anger, much more dramatic than showing something of gunfire.

[Video displays the text: "Ethos: Goodwill/Caring (Eunoia). Repeats his concern for what children are seeing on TV. He has dedicated a large portion of his life to caring for children."]

Rogers: I'm constantly concerned about what our children are seeing. And for fifteen years, I have tried in this country and Canada to present what I feel is a meaningful expression of care.

Pastore: Do you narrate it?

Rogers: I'm the host, yes. And I do all the puppets, and I write all the music, and I write all the scripts.

Pastore: Well, I'm supposed to be a pretty tough guy, and this the first time I've had goosebumps for the last two days.

[*Senate chuckles*]

[*Video displays the text: "Logos: Frame. Brings Pastore from his goosebumps back to the frame: he's developed a way to communicate with children."*]

Rogers: Well, I'm grateful, not only for your goosebumps but for

he should approve the funding request. Rogers finishes by telling Pastore the words of a song from his show. This is what's known as an "enargeia" in rhetoric. He's already used it once. The idea is to bring the audience into a scene and make them feel present as if Pastore is at the show himself. It's a pathos appeal, and it's a great way to end. Ending on an emotional note is the best way to change people's minds and get them to take action.

[*Video displays the text: "Pathos: Vivid Description (Enargeia). Gives Pastore a virtual experience of seeing the show, emotionally connecting him to why it's so important."*]

Rogers: Could I tell you the words of one of the songs, which I feel is very important?

Pastore: Yes.

[Soft piano begins playing over the background.]

Rogers: This has to do with that good feeling of control, which I feel that the children need to know is there. And it starts out: "What do you do with the mad that you feel?" And that first line came straight from a child. I work with children, doing puppets, and in very personal communication with small groups. "What do you do with the mad that you feel, when you feel so mad you could bite? When the whole wide world seems oh-so-wrong and nothing you do seems very right? What do

that's wrong. And be able to do something else instead, and think this song. I can stop when I want to, can stop when I wish. Can stop, stop, stop, anytime. And what a good feeling to feel like this, and know that the feeling is really mine. Know that there's something deep inside, that helps us become what we can. For a girl can be someday a lady, and the boy can be someday a man."

Pastore: I think it's wonderful. I think it's wonderful. Looks like you just earned the $20 million.

[*Senate laughing*]

[*Applause*]

Narrator: You don't need a deconstruction of this interaction to see the merit in Rogers' testimony. His calm demeanor and earnestness alone might persuade even the most curmudgeonly person to his side. But whether he used these persuasive techniques wittingly or not, they are the reason this interaction was so successful. Sure, Rogers' position here is a strong one, but I think if he used the same techniques to argue something more controversial, he'd disarmed even the most oppositional person. He skillfully used the means of persuasion to speak to Pastore's elephant, and the rider came right along with it. What I think differentiates this exchange from so many others that I see today is that it's actually an argument. Nowadays, we mostly just see fights. The Greeks were very purposeful in this distinction. They knew that in a

argument gets people to do what you want—it is a means to a solution." Fights happen because people haven't done the persuasive groundwork.

[Excerpt from The Simpsons plays briefly.]

Lisa: Bart, just get out of here.

Bart: Hey! It's a free country, you get out.

Lisa: That doesn't make sense.

Bart: I know you are, but what am I?

Lisa: Get out! Get out!

Narrator: In fights, one side wants the other to hear their own sentiments, their own logic, and they assault each other's ethos. Remember that ethos, pathos, and logos are an appeal to the audience, not the speaker. If you want to conduct an argument, instead of a fight, then all the means of persuasion must speak to the other person's elephant. Once you've done that, then you can start throwing more contentious points of reasoning and logic from your side out there. But, as we learn from Rogers, you still have to use all the means of persuasion in harmony. Engaging in arguments rather than fights sounds really basic, but it's extremely important.

A great example comes from research psychologist John Gottman and his "love lab" at the University of Washington. In the 1980s and 90s, Gottman taped

Gottman found that married couples argued as much as those who ended in divorce. But, the successful couples used arguments differently. They used them to solve problems and work out differences; they showed faith in the outcome. The unsuccessful couples, on the other hand, used their sessions to attack each other. They were constantly defensive, overly critical, and contemptuous of each other. In other words, the happy couples argued, and the unhappy ones fought.

I think one of the big problems in all of this as well is the language we use to describe arguments. Language drastically affects how we perceive reality, and in American culture, at least, we frame arguments like fights, like war. As cognitive linguist George Lakoff points out, "We attack their positions, and we defend our own. We gain and lose ground. If we find a position indefensible, we can abandon it and take a new line of attack. We shoot down all of their arguments. We dig in. The person on the other side of the argument is seen as an enemy." Instead, I agree with Lakoff when he says we could frame arguments like dances. The means of persuasion are much more prevalent in this metaphor. One person comes forward to reach out to the other. They are opposites, but they work together. They are cooperating. The argument becomes more about agreement than disagreement. Indeed, we don't

So often when I see political situations like this, especially on tribal media like Twitter and Facebook, I immediately frame it in my head as the war between good and evil, not a dance between mutually interested groups. But these are rarely good-versus-evil scenarios and—don't get me wrong—there are exceptions of truly ill-intentioned people. But most of the time, it's just two humans with different viewpoints and goals, and both could potentially be convinced of the other's viewpoints and goals.

If I always frame things as good versus evil, then I'm going to write off huge swathes of people for no reason. I do it more often than I want to. I see evil in the person on the other side of the argument before I even read or listen to anything. And that's a problem when it comes to learning the full picture and finding a better synthesis of ideas and beliefs. "The only way for the whole truth to emerge," wrote Philosopher John Stuart Mill, "is by the reconciling and combining of opposites." I can't learn, I can't help, and I can't persuade if I don't listen.

I want to add two caveats in all of this. History has shown us that when one side makes repeated attempts to argue for political and civil rights, but they aren't listened to by the other side, then the only answer is civil disobedience. But movements like this should never precede a genuine attempt at discourse with the other side. Protest

their side, or you force them to believe something, then it's unlikely they'll ever come to your side.

As Lincoln once cautioned, "Dictate a man's judgment, command his action, or mark him to be despised, and he will retreat within himself, close all the avenues to his head and his heart; and even though your cause being naked truth itself, transformed to the heaviest lance, harder than steel, and sharper than steel can be made, and though you throw it with more Herculean force and precision, you shall be no more able to pierce him than to penetrate the hard shell of a tortoise with a rye straw."

The second caveat is that means of persuasion can be used as much for deception as they can for good. That's also why it's important to know when you've been put under the spell of persuasion. The best defense against a master persuader is knowing their tools, so you can recognize when you're being duped. I'm a firm believer that the best storytellers, articulators, and persuaders, not only have the strongest relationships with people, but they also run the world. They know how to get friends and audiences to like and trust them. They know that facts don't change opinions unless they first speak to people's sentiments, their sense of identity, and self-interest. And ultimately, they know how to get people to take action.

arguments aren't about winning, they're about winning people over to your side.

[*Video shows two people talking: Person 1: "We can disagree constructively.," Person 2: "I'll listen w/ healthy skepticism."*]

[*Soft piano begins to play*]

That's why it's important to find commonality and trust before getting into a contentious argument or working out a problem—even with people you believe are beneath contempt. As Jonathan Haidt says, "If you really want to open your mind, open your heart first. We are deeply intuitive creatures whose gut feelings drive our strategic reasoning. The persuader's goal should be to convey respect and warmth and an openness to dialogue before stating one's own case." Praise, humor, and sincere expressions of interest go a long way in getting people to hear your side. I'll add to that list "a good story." Stories help find commonality between people's experience and values. They break down prejudice, indifference, and they create trust. Once you skillfully establish these forms of persuasion, you might have a chance for the opposition to hear your side. And maybe, with enough reasoning and logic, or a good story, you'll even bring them to your side.

If we want to enact change with our arguments, whether it be with family, in our business, or in politics, then I think we can all take a cue from Fred Rogers. He

springs from an argument among friends." The keyword being "friends."

Mister Rogers: You've made this day a special day by just your being you. There's no person in the whole world like you, and I like you just the way you are.

[*Video displays book:* Thank you for arguing*. "This is the best intro to rhetoric you will find. Clear and funny. Will make you a better persuader/conversationalist. Jay helped with this video, so buy his book!"*]

[*Video displays book:* The righteous mind, why are good people divided by politics and religion - *"This is a must-read for today's political climate. It gets into more of the psychology I discussed, the moral differences/biases between groups, and the complications of talking to people's elephants because of those moral differences. Easily one of the most important books I've ever read."*]

[*End of video*]