**EMCS2400: Effective Leadership**

Post-Work: Assignment - Watch/Critique - Analyzing Rhetorical Strategies

Brian Russel Davis, brian\_davis@brown.edu

### Interview ( with a person I don’t agree with )

*Donald Trump 60 Minutes Interview* <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/donald-trump-full-interview-60-minutes-transcript-lesley-stahl-2018-10-14/>

**Obfuscating facts and replacing them with fear** seems like the primary strategy President Trump uses when speaking with a journalist.  *“You don’t know that … ”, “We don’t know that ...”, “People say ... ”* are phrases that are used again and again to cast doubt on widely agreed upon facts. **And it’s true** most of us don’t have empirical knowledge of the topics being discussed. If a person can cast doubt on what we think we know then inject a commanding statement like “What we don’t want is … ” and then talks about a negative hypothetical like “people losing jobs or damaging the economy”, it’s possible to “create room” in our minds for that new assertion, even though it also doesn’t have a basis in fact. He leverages our own doubt to heave things we believe out of the way to make room for something he says we should fear. I can hear a CSO saying to a group of executives, “I don’t know if this data was stolen by insiders, lost due to incompetence or was the result of a hack … But I know what we don’t want, to have to spend 10 times as much money cleaning up the mess the next time this situation happens again” The executives have no choice to agree because there is no way to prove attribution and they have to agree with the second point as well because nobody wants to spend 10 times as much money, even though this may be a false choice.

This approach is most effective with people who don't have a strong position or who are unacquainted to the facts of an event, circumstance or situation. As a matter of fact, our legal system works in favor of those facing conviction in the same way if the defense can show a reasonable doubt. For the most part, this strategy is effective but questionable because it raises an epistemological question when we really need to be asking a moral one.

### TV Commercial

*Everything Sticks to Stefon Diggs' Hands*

<https://youtu.be/LKWQNPv9x_Q>

**The use of nonsense is advertising has become quite popular.** The ad usually starts with some nonsensical facts, statement or circumstance to draw in the viewer's attention, then compares the nonsense to the value proposition being offered by the company. In this Geico ad Stefon Diggs, a wide receiver for the Minnesota Vikings is seen trying to check his mailbox. Two neighbors are looking at him as struggles because everything is sticking to his hands in a nonsensical way. When one of the neighbors says “I can’t believe it”, we think the character is referring to the nonsense, but instead, we are redirected to the value proposition for Geico. In a very clever way, our brains now associate the dopamine we experienced from laughing at the nonsense with the insurance company’s value proposition.

I think this type of bait and switch is highly effective for building brand awareness, but probably ineffective in converting prospects into clients. Personally, I am not motivated to switch my insurance because of the clever physical pun followed by a bait and switch. Gieco is probably counting on building enough brand awareness with these funny commercials so when people are ready to switch Gieco is top of mind. Then again I am a software engineer so I am often motivated by what I perceive to be facts, not emotion when making decisions to purchase something important like insurance.

### Press Statements

Statements from the Press Secretary

<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/statement-press-secretary-32/>

<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/statement-press-secretary-27/>

Both press statements are very short but have sharp and commanding language. In the beginning, the statements are designed to make the reader choose a side as they define “right and wrong” and describe the events that have transpired. In the statement about immigration, there is a lot of finger pointing but said in a way that assumes the reader understands and agrees with the underlying facts. The tone is defiant, angry and paints a picture of the other side as reckless and “un-American”. Then at the end as if summoning the voice of Uncle Sam himself, the speaker hints at what the American people feel and moreover what the Trump Administration is going to do: “Advocate for the American Way” against those who are fighting to destroy it.

I am sure this good guy vs. bad guy message happens in every administration. While the anger and frustration conveyed in the statements feel very real, the notion that they are working on “behalf of the American people” feels forced. It’s hard to believe the voice of American advocacy when 80% of the writing vilifies elected Amercian representatives. These types of press statements are better campaign propaganda then they are an official statement from the White House, whose charge I believe is to uphold the Constitution and be the voice of “We the People.” I am sure it makes the people writing it feels good to be using the White House as Pulpit because it commands such authority and power, and the base equally feels vindicated.

### Hostile Crowd

*Beto O'Rourke on NFL Players Kneeling During the National Anthem*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SGWmh-maevk>

Let’s get this out of the way … Watching this brings me to the point of tears, each and every time I watch it. To see someone who doesn’t look like me accurately account for the experiences of my ancestors and demonstrate a deep understanding of the struggles we have been through as African Americans is moving. But, he didn’t begin with that. He started in a place of absolute respect for the young man who asked the question, the service members and veterans in the audience, then masterfully pivoted to talking about a perspective that many in the audience might not be familiar with. Yes, people have bled and died fighting for this country as service members, but people have also bled and died trying to prove out the words of the Constitution, the Magna Carta and the Bill of Rights. It takes a special kind of guts to stand in front of a crowd of older white veterans and say that, but it needed to be said, and he said it with power, authenticity, and respect.

And just when you think it can’t get any better, he doesn’t something amazing ( for a politician ), he takes **personal ownership**. “Who they are really frustrated with is people like me, and people who are charged with serving the public trust”. He doesn’t end with wagging his finger, his leadership on this issue is that of a role model. He ends with a call to understand ***the other***, and his commitment to bring us together.

Overall I thought the way he handled the situation was perfect ( its no wonder this video went viral ). He was authentic and personal but not in a pandering way. He really answered the question! ( imagine that! ). He made it sound easy because I think he is really talking about something he believes … and as he said in the video we are all Americans no matter what we feel about this issue.