

Class and Section: CMN 001 A18

Assignment: Rhetorical Analysis Paper - TED Talk

Name: Sriram Suresh

When it comes to working on an assignment for one's classes or working on a life goal that a person sets for themselves, it is often easy for one to lose the motivation and interest needed to actively pursue the task at hand, especially if the person is not particularly fond of this kind of task and is just doing it for the sake of getting it done. This is often also the case when the task is open-ended or when the rate of progress is not high as the person would have wanted it to be. In cases like these, people tend to procrastinate without a thought as, naturally, something more captivating and fun would take their minds off this arduous task. In these cases, the incentive to start/resume working on the unfinished task would be extremely low as one would rather, for example, continue watching their favorite Youtuber fire away at cool looking aliens rather than work on solving problems for a class about differential equations that their college department requires that they take. In his TED Talk called *Inside the mind of a master procrastinator*, Tim Urban artfully uses all three rhetorical appeals to shed light on how a procrastinator's brain works by breaking down two starkly different types of procrastination that often wreak havoc in the lives of people.

Although the speaker never promises the audience that he magically has solutions to getting rid of procrastination once and for all, along the course of his speech, his good-will stands out as he seems to intend to educate the audience on procrastination by giving his own life example.

His end goal seems to be to give his audience a vivid look into typical signs and occurrences of procrastination, the different types of procrastination, and how one could go about curbing it. The speaker demonstrates good sense as he realizes that his habit of procrastination is not good for himself and that he must make conscious efforts to change for the better, which according to him, he still struggles with. However, the confidence with which he presents his material and the relatable life situations he poses inspire confidence in the speaker's credentials and give us a glimpse into how difficult it is to really beat procrastination. These details exemplify the speaker's good moral character and make the speaker seem to be credible and qualified enough to speak on the topic of procrastination as he also gives direct examples of how he tried to break his habit of procrastination. He also mentions his blog called "Wait but why?" where he usually writes about procrastination among other things. According to him, he has had a lot of perplexed individuals reach out to him explaining their own afflictions with procrastination. Thus, the user makes great use of ethos to make his case and establish himself. From the contents of his speech, elaborated on further are ways he rhetorically managed to do this.

To illustrate the notion of procrastination to his audience in the least amount of time possible, the speaker runs through an example from his own life by using easy-to-understand graph plots as presentation aids. One clever way he does this is when in the intro of his speech, he begins contrasting his work ethic with that of a 'normal person' by presenting graphs of how while a non-procrastinator would spread an assignment out evenly over the time period they have to work on it, he would instead do everything only on the day of the deadline. This seems like an

effort to humanize himself and make himself most relatable to the procrastinators in the audience. The speaker also uses humor to further establish himself in the eyes of his audience with his story about his 90-page senior thesis where he “lies” and says that his school called to tell him that his thesis was the best one they had seen yet, thus tricking the audience into thinking for a second that he is amazing. This seems to serve as a good segue as it sets up the audience’s mindsets to approach procrastination from the perspective of a cartoon. Here, the speaker draws up an analogy where he uses an “instant gratification monkey” to allude to the way a procrastinator’s brain works where in addition to the “rational decision-maker” present in everyone’s brain, the brains of procrastinators also contain this monkey. To visually illustrate this analogy, he uses a Venn diagram with two circles, one for the monkey and the other for the rational decision-maker. He then defines the overlap between the two circles as the middle zone where the interests of the monkey and the rational decision-maker align, i.e., well-earned leisure time. He goes on to explain how the only thing this monkey is afraid of is the ‘Panic Monster’, a creature that is dormant for the most part and only wakes up when faced with severe circumstances such as a fast-approaching deadline, public embarrassment, a threat to one’s livelihood, etc. Hence, the use of such simple but effective visuals to explain the inner workings of a procrastinator’s brain in the form of a cartoon to the audience shows us that the speaker did a great job at using presentation aids to strongly demonstrate his logical reasoning of how and why he thinks people procrastinate. The speaker further expertly exploits Logos when he begins to conclude his speech by offering his idea of a “Life calendar” which consists of one box per week for a 90-year life. The speaker mentions that we all have a job of looking at this calendar and thinking hard about what we are “really” procrastinating on in life and that

we all need to stay aware of the instant gratification monkey. He then uses humor to perfectly close out his speech by referring to the aforementioned job and joking that since there aren't that many boxes left on the calendar, ¹(Urban 13:43) "It's a job that should probably start today. Well, maybe not today, but, you know, sometime soon." His closing statement perfectly uses irony to hint at the very crux of his topic, procrastination.

Thus far, we have looked at the ways in which the speaker employed Ethos and Logos to appeal to his audience. These two rhetorical appeals focus on the rhetorical elements of the speaker and the speech. However, how the speaker and the speech directly influence the audience can only be noted by discussing the Pathos involved. Firstly, we see that the speaker appeals to the audience's interests by calling out the procrastinator within everybody. The speaker leads by saying that everyone procrastinates at some time or the other, especially in cases not involving deadlines, i.e., long-term procrastination and that the only difference is how much more some people procrastinate when compared to others. By speaking on this notion of procrastination which much of the audience could potentially relate to, the speaker inherently was bound to appeal to the interests of his audience. Secondly, in an ideal world, since everybody would like to get done with all the stuff they have planned as soon as possible and, since procrastination is something that no person wants to deal with, the speaker appeals to the audience's values by implicitly promising to leave them with a few handy tips and tricks to help them stop procrastinating going forward. Thirdly, since many people from the audience seemed to relate

¹ Urban, Tim. "Tim Urban: Inside the mind of a master procrastinator | TED" *YouTube*, uploaded by TED, 6 Apr. 2016, www.youtube.com/watch?v=arj7oStGLkU

to the issue of procrastination, the speaker seemingly appeals to the feelings of the audience by speaking about the response to his blog post (which he had made two years prior to his TED Talk) about procrastination where thousands of people from diverse backgrounds had heavily written to him talking about their frustration at how procrastination had adversely affected their lives. He also mentions how, in the case of long-term procrastination, such as with life goals like exercising for health or keeping in touch with family, the panic monster has no reason to wake up, thus causing procrastinators to suffer quietly and privately due to the regret of not having accomplished something which they should have. He adds that long-term procrastination impaired certain people to such an extent that their frustration was not because they could not achieve something but because they could not even start to pursue it.

In conclusion, we analyzed the ways in which Tim Urban creatively and intricately used Ethos, Logos, and Pathos to educate his audience on how he thinks the mind of a procrastinator works. While some of the aspects of these rhetorical appeals are not obvious at first glance, upon a closer look, the speaker seems to have utilized as many of these as possible to make his relatively short Ted Talk highly informative and introspective. Overall, the interesting observations and analogies made by the speaker seem to provide a unique approach to looking into countering something that plagues the lives of countless people from diverse backgrounds and age groups.