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Ethos, Pathos, and Logos in a Leader

by Megan DalSanto

(English 2820)

Leadership is not always glorious and successful. Rather than having one concrete definition, it is a combination of many actions and qualities, including focus, inspiration, discipline, communication, and friendship. There are different types of leadership ranging from being responsible for a division in the military, to managing a small company or restaurant, to leading a child by the hand across a street. However we commonly measure leaders by success and task completion. A leader must first win over the trust of those following them and be consistent with that trust. Examples from a whaling novel, a history article, and a memoir show how leaders can use ethos, pathos, and logos appeals to gain trust and be effective in accomplishing goals, and also show the negative results of not doing so.

Aristotle's three principles for persuasion each have a specific definition. First, ethos is credibility of the leader earned from respect or having a position of authority. Author Tamar Mshvenieradze states in the article "Logos, Ethos, and Pathos in Political Discourse" that "we tend to believe people whom we respect, someone who is likable and worthy [of respect]. Ethos is composed of correct attitudes, respect, favor, and which is very important, ethics" (Mshvenieradze 84). By having ethos and good character, a leader will find it easier to gain attention and approval of listeners. Second, pathos focuses on audience members. Mshvenieradze defines pathos as "the power with which the speaker's message moves the audience to his or her desirable emotional action" (Mshvenieradze 84). A leader needs emotion and energy in their speech and body language. Emotion is a natural instinct and targeting it increases the chances that listeners will be moved to action on a battlefield, in a vote, or whatever the persuasive circumstance is. Finally there is logos, which Mshvenieradze states is "persuading by the use of reasoning which includes critical cognition, analytical skills, good memory, and purposeful behavior, which is the most important argumentation" (Mshvenieradze 84). When asked to do something, a person will want to know *why* before doing it. Leaders who explain tactics, use facts, and communicate openly about what is being done will quickly earn trust and respect, two qualities mentioned earlier when talking about ethos. These three appeals are all necessary for leaders who are looking to persuade and unite a group of individuals.

Beginning with an example of good leadership, Captain Ahab from *Moby Dick* showed his ethos, pathos, and logos in Chapter 36, "The Quarter Deck". His authority comes from being the captain of the vessel and being liked by his crew. In the beginning of the chapter, Ahab summons the entire crew "aft". He speaks to them enthusiastically about his plan to hunt the white whale, and he holds their attention for quite some time. Later, Starbuck, Stubb, and Flask, three officers onboard the boat, "quailed before his strong, sustained, and mystic aspect" (Melville 9). This description of Ahab shows who he is as a character, which is a strong man, and it confirms his ethos. He also displays pathos. "More and more strangely and fiercely glad and approving, grew the countenance of the old man at every shout; while the mariners began to gaze curiously at each other, as if marvelling how it was that they themselves became so excited at such seemingly purposeless questions" (Melville 3). This quote shows the building excitement and curiosity of the crew as Ahab spoke. His crew felt something inside in their hearts and it motivated them to join Ahab in finding Moby Dick. Ahab calls to his crew's bravery, testing to see if they will be cowards or step up to the challenge. No man wants to be seen as a coward, so this is effective in stirring up emotions. Finally, Ahab uses pathos when he appeals to the defeat of the enemy, a classic goal amongst armies, teams, and other

groups. Who would not be excited to defeat the enemy! Ahab is a smart leader to have ethos and use pathos, but he also uses logos to address his crew. He explains that hunting Moby Dick is worthwhile because “my vengeance will fetch a great premium here!” (Melville 6). The white whale is so large that killing it will earn money in the market. They are whalers, so his logic aligns with their overall goal. When questioned why Ahab wants to find Moby Dick so badly, Ahab gives an analogy. “How can the prisoner reach outside except by thrusting through the wall? To me, the white whale is that wall, shoved near to me” (Melville 6). The whale dominates Ahab’s thoughts, closing in on him like four walls. He must find him and exact revenge, and he explains it as a universal challenge to his men. Whaling takes teamwork and Ahab will only kill Moby Dick with his men’s help. After all, it is their profession and they should be able to handle it, so Ahab’s logic is correct, even if this seems like a personal undertaking.

Next is a leadership example from a memoir. One very well-known president and general is Ulysses S. Grant. His leadership came on a grander and truer scale than Ahab’s, who was fictional. Grant is a well-known war hero, commanding the Union Army to victory during the Civil War. He went to West Point, was a personally honest man, and had a family and four children. His ethos and credibility were established over time as he succeeded as a leader. John Eggers, Ph.D., wrote in the article “Credibility, Commitment and Dialogue: Cornerstones of Leadership” that “One must demonstrate values that prospective followers admire and which motivate them to trust the leader. Because they are being asked to undertake a difficult journey, followers need to believe that the leader is the sort of person who is honest, forward-looking, inspiring, and competent” (Eggers 84). General Grant was just that. His simple qualities of common sense, decision making, self-control, and confidence made him likeable and easy to trust. Soldiers wanted to hear what he had to say. The book *Leadership Lessons from General Ulysses S. Grant* by Al Kaltman provides examples of his pathos and logos. He used pathos to muster up superior performances from ordinary citizen soldiers. He was considerate and fair to soldiers as well as someone who acted ethically, two lessons learned from Kaltman’s book. “A pragmatist who learned from his own and others’ successes and failures, he brought new dimensions to strategic planning” (Kaltman XI). Grant’s logos came from learning from others’ mistakes and applying what he learned to his orders to his men. He was well known for his planning and setting of priorities, which no doubt made his men feel more comfortable, although they were at war. Clearly defined goals and explanations from a leader make great logos when addressing soldiers.

Captain Ahab and General Grant are two examples of good leadership by using ethos, pathos, and logos in persuading their crew and troops. However, not everyone is as successful. Isaiah Stillman was quickly named a general in the Illinois militia in 1832. In Scott Dyar’s essay “Stillman’s Run”, he comments on how “this rapid advancement was not uncommon in the militia systems in Jacksonian America, and had more to do with a person’s social position and oratory than an understanding of military tactics or leadership qualities” (Dyar 2). Major Stillman was not appointed for great leadership qualities, which makes his ethos questionable. He had not built up respect with his troops and could not provide inspiration for why they should listen to him. This led to many problems. He also lacked pathos, because “the whereabouts of Major Stillman during this critical moment are still very much a mystery” (Dyar 5). He was not with his troops to muster them up! They felt many emotions and concerns of being leaderless which went unanswered. He lacked logos, too. His soldiers had no facts or knowledge on what they were doing. “275 untrained men who had no proper interpreter and little formal military discipline... some were intoxicated, and all were eager to get into action against the Indians” (Dyar 4). His troops wanted to fight some Indians. They had no goals, no orders, and what happened was chaos. The white-flag bearing Indians were disregarded, chased after by some of Stillman’s men, who then turned around and rode for their lives in the opposite direction when the Indians came back, and finally his men were embarrassed as they scurried across Old Man’s Creek. These events show the lack of leadership from Major Stillman.

“Stillman’s Run stands as a textbook example of why training, discipline, and good leadership are all essential to a unit in the field” (Dyar 6). Stillman’s unit definitely lacked those aspects and failed in a battle situation. For the short time that Major Stillman was around he was a poor leader compared to General Grant or Captain Ahab.

After looking at two good examples and one bad example of how a leader can use ethos, pathos, and logos to persuade, it is obvious that everyone benefits from a respected, passionate, and logical leader. Ahab favored heavily on pathos and evoking emotion in his crew, but still had logos in explaining why he wanted to chase Moby Dick, and had ethos as a respected captain. General Grant established ethos early on as a man and his pathos and logos came naturally with it. Major Stillman’s ethos was farfetched. Instead of working on building it up and training his men, he chose to become unreliable and therefore failed in pathos, logos, and overall leadership. One mode of persuasion is not enough to gain the favor and following that a leader seeks. They need to appeal to their listeners using some ethos, some logos, and also pathos to be successful. A common theme from all three texts is being a leader takes commitment. Yet, when a leader puts forth that effort, others will be able to trust them, resulting in teamwork and a successful mission.

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