



Ewan Pearson

## Incomplete Benefits

Ewan Pearson compares pitches with basketball to explain why so many of them need work

It's great to provide effective and efficient services, but what does that actually mean?

Not a lot, it would seem. We do a lot of work on pitches and other acts of persuasion every year, and have been doing so for over 25 years now. In that time, the reasons why someone wins and someone else loses have barely changed. They boil down to three main criteria that are: mainly logical and rational; sometimes emotional and rational; and occasionally emotional and irrational. Always though, there is a set of decision-level criteria that the buyer has, and the key to success is to get a better score on these than anyone else.

We help with all three of these categories, but to give me some focus and a reasonable word count, I want to look here at the idea of logical, rational arguments placed in support of case, and our frequent finding that these arguments are not well made.

Usually, you see, the problem is that people who pitch don't usually finish off the job. They play the game of basketball, bouncing the ball from person to person, observing the rules, and then take a shot at goal, only to stop with the ball freeze-framed, suspended above the net, as if

finished. All the spectators groan at the lack of a 'dunk', the ball is not put into the hoop, does not fall through the net, and does not score the points. Instead, we are left in suspense until time drifts on, the spectators go home, and the match is lost.

No, I have not taken leave of my senses or taken some illicit substance. It's a metaphor for what so many teams do when they pitch.

They are OK, and sometimes even quite good, at explaining what they would do if they won the work - the features of their products or services - but when it comes to describing how the client might benefit, they fall short so often.

A typical pitch will crescendo to the ultimate claim that what you would get is *insight*, or that they would *add value*, or that what they'd do for you will make your business more *efficient*, *effective*, *seamless*, *sustainable* or *productive*. The problem with all those lovelies is that the buyer nods wisely with an inane rictus grin on their faces, trying not to show the pain, but inside there is agony, fog, spaghetti, a dullness that only happens when we are thinking 'I don't have a bloomin' clue what you're on about, not a sausage, nope, nada, keine, nicht. It sounded

*“The problem is that people who pitch don't usually finish off the job”*

Grant Pearson Brown  
Consulting Ltd.

The Presentation &  
Business Development  
Specialists

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## Incomplete Benefits contd.

good, but... wha... huh?’

In polite circles we call these statements ‘incomplete benefits’. That is, the argument has progressed well from an explanation of what the product or service is (please leave the sales team now if you can’t even do that), but it never reached its destination. These words may be common in business pitches, but they are

abstract and thus almost meaningless without tangible examples or elaboration to advance them to match what the client wants to achieve. The ultimate destination should be a clear and explicit statement of how the client will, in the end, benefit most from the product or service that is being pitched, i.e. put the ball through the net. It has to be specific, relevant, and valued by the client, and that means if they want a watch, don’t try to sell them a clock. It also means you must ask them what they want, and if they don’t know, be skilful at discussion and asking questions to find out. The pitch also has to be better at that than anyone else’s proposition, but we all know that... even if sometimes, for example in audit pitches, it seems almost impossible to speak to that. That’s where we are called in, often a bit late in the game, to put the fire out. I do love Mixaphors (mixed metaphors)!

The most typical end benefits can be counted on one hand. They are saving or making money; reducing risk

(including financial and reputational); reducing hassle; making or saving time; and looking good. I can be clear about that list because, having derived it over the last 25 years, and having asked our clients continually to suggest others, none have come forth... yet.

If you do have to say words like *efficient* and *effective* (and pitchers often do say both as some sort of triumphant pairing), then you have taken the ball to the hoop, but to dunk it through the net you must



When you are pitching, always make sure you finish off the job.

go further.

In the next article, Hasnaê explains that price is normally not the reason why pitches are lost. It’s true. But it can be that one of the pitching firms has offered an excellent service at a premium price, and the client is thinking ‘but that’s not what I asked for, want or need’. It hits a huge Cold Button. They lose because they are offering something the client didn’t want, and that is all down to a combination of a shortfall in pre-pitch conversation with them to find out what really matters, and the building of a pitch based on that conversation.

So I have some simple advice for you: if you are preparing a pitch, find out what the client needs most of all, then build your pitch. And if then you hear one of these incomplete

benefits, ask the ‘so what?’ question. Ask what *efficiency* or *effectiveness* (or the others) mean in this specific context, and build the logic bridge to one or more of the end benefits I have listed above. Then all you have to do is be the best at providing that, and the best at explaining why. Simples.

Happy pitching.

*“If you are preparing a pitch, find out what the client needs most of all”*

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# The Narrative Fallacy

Hasnaê Kerach explores the mind's ability to create stories that have no grounding in reality

From the earliest cave paintings in France to Egyptian Hieroglyphics, storytelling has been used as an effective and compelling way to communicate.

The same applies in business, where most of us have realised that storytelling is an essential part of persuasion.<sup>1</sup> Research has shown that effective storytelling can be a powerful tool for influencing your audience, and that engaging others at an emotional level is far more impactful than stating mere facts.<sup>2</sup> Your clients are more likely to remember the story you told them during a pitch than the numbers or statistics.

However, the storytelling I am referring to in this article is not the sort we create to convey a specific message, nor is it the type that is consciously used to change your client's perspective. Instead, what I will be exploring are the stories we tell *ourselves* about ourselves and our environment, including our actions and interactions with other people and situations.

We tell ourselves such stories all day every day; we analyse various events in our lives, and we attribute meaning to them. Without even necessarily realising it, we create a web of inter-relationships that help to explain our understanding of reality.

For example, take a minute to cast your mind back to a time where you or your team lost a pitch. Reflect on the relationships you created between the various variables of that event, where you analysed some of the data available and concluded that you lost a pitch because, for example, your competitor's prices were lower than yours. In doing this, you have created a cause and effect link between two variables that did not exist before: 'Our

competitor is cheaper than us; we lost a pitch to our competitor; this means we lost a pitch because we are more expensive than our competitor.'

This tendency to connect events and impose linear interpretations on them is known as the 'narrative fallacy'.<sup>3</sup> Nassim Taleb, the author of *The Black Swan: The Impact of the Highly Probable*, and a distinguished Professor of Risk Engineering at the New York University Tandon School of Engineering, explains this further: 'The narrative fallacy addresses our limited ability to look at sequences of facts without weaving an explanation into them, or,

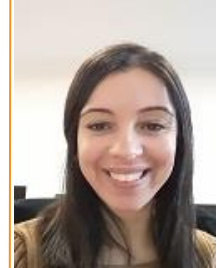
equivalently, forcing a logical link, an arrow of relationships upon them. Explanations bind facts together. They make them all the more easily remembered; they help them make more sense.'<sup>4</sup>

Constructing a narrative by building a story is one way that brains make sense of the world around us. Manufacturing a story is

therefore an important function that helps us process information. The danger, however, is that although at first glance, the cause and effect links we attribute to events might seem very logical, most of the time they are not actually true.

Going back to my earlier example, after creating a connection between losing the pitch and your competitor's price, it is quite possible that you might believe this narrative to be true. You might therefore use this to make a prediction about your next pitch: 'We will lose our next pitch if our prices are higher than our competitor.' Nevertheless, jumping to this conclusion will potentially result in you feeling less confident about your next presentation, possibly even leading you to lower your prices. Consequently, you are at risk of

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## The Narrative Fallacy contd.

altering your whole business strategy based on a false narrative, a story you created about two distinct variables that don't actually correlate.

It is possible that every aspect of the way you communicate and behave might be governed and driven by the narrative you have created about yourself, other people, past events, your career, and many other factors. For example, it would be easy to assume that some academic and professional achievements are thanks to the way their parents raised them: if their parents were strict, they therefore had to work hard, and this resulted in them having the success they have. In reality,

however, if these cause and effect links were true, it would mean that everyone with strict parents would be a high achiever, when this is not the case. In fact, there are multiple variables, some of them uncontrollable, that affect one's success: while the way someone is raised contributes to this, it is not the whole picture.

So, what can you do to avoid the trap of the narrative fallacy?

The first step is to understand this fallacy and to accept that, as a human being, you are subject to this way of thinking. Just because you decided to create a story about a series of events and label it as real doesn't mean that the story has any inherent truth.

Once you subject yourself to critical analysis, you will recognise the storytelling pattern in your thinking, and you'll be able to determine whether you are assigning linkage where there should be none. For example, the fact that you lost the

pitch might have nothing at all to do with the prices of your competitor. In fact, our post-pitch analysis demonstrates that price is *rarely* the reason why a pitch was lost; in reality, there might be other, more significant factors in play that you did not previously consider, such as the timing of the pitch, your lesser communication skills, or the low cohesion of your team.

It is also important to understand that everyone can build different stories

around the same set of variables. For example, you might believe that your colleague who stays long hours is hardworking and eager to learn, while an outsider might believe that they are

overworked or have time management issues: here, two different narratives have been created from the same observations.

The secret is to become aware of your mind's story-producing ability and to use it wisely. It is best to consider all available data without designating meaning to a selected few at the exclusion of others. Realise that much of the time you just don't know, accept it, and be comfortable with uncertainty. As Nassim Taleb himself explains, 'when searching for real truth, favor experimentation over storytelling, favor experience over history, and favor clinical knowledge over grand theories.'<sup>5</sup>



Don't make assumptions about losing a pitch: remember that lots of factors are important, including teamwork.

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1. Baldoni, J. (2011, March 24), 'Using Stories to Persuade,' *Harvard Business Review*.
2. Paul, A. M. (2012, March 17), 'Your Brain on Fiction,' *The New York Times*.
3. Taleb, N. N. (2008), *The Black Swan: The Impacts of the Highly Improbable*, London: Penguin Group.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.

# Of Mice and (Mad) Men

## Desmond Harney argues that balance optimises persuasive communication, even in advertising

In 1959, U.S. Nobel Laureate John Steinbeck worked in Somerset, later saying he'd been happier there than any other place on Earth: 'I hear and smell and see and feel the earth and I ... am alone – the largest aloneness ... mystic and wonderful.'<sup>1</sup> Sixty years on, Steinbeck's earlier splendid isolation sounds unfamiliar. We are never now 'alone'. In 2005, *The Guardian* estimated we were already exposed to c. 3,500 adverts alone, on average, every day, and traffic hasn't got any lighter since then.<sup>2</sup> Much of that all-pervading communication is simply intrusive, though. It doesn't engage or persuade us. Ethan Zuckerman, one of the inventors of pop-up advertising, now profusely apologises, claiming he 'didn't realize what he was bringing into the world.'<sup>3</sup>

Luckily, within this morass of indiscriminate messaging, we all have the capability to improve the effectiveness of our own communication and its cut-through, simply by focussing on a few principles, which broadly coalesce into knowing what you want to say, and saying it concisely, in the best way possible.

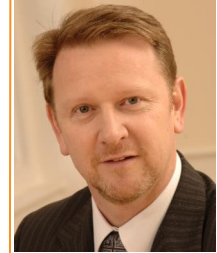
One such principle is Aristotle's view that persuasive communication requires a balance of 'Three Appeals' (Ethos-Logos-Pathos).<sup>4</sup> His theory is supported, almost 2,400 years on, by the work of psychologists Petty and Cacioppo (see Lynda's article), amongst others, who demonstrated - via their work on the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) - that Aristotle was right all along about the importance of these three appeals.<sup>5</sup>

Ethos is either the means by which we appeal to an audience's sense of right and wrong, or, alternatively, it can be the

way we use position or status to convince an audience to trust us. Petty and Cacioppo describe it as a prerequisite for effective communication, since you cannot easily persuade people who do not trust you. Logos is the use of logical assertions which allow listeners to follow, and agree with, our assertions and claims ('Q.E.D.?). Pathos is the degree of passion we exude, overtly demonstrating our enthusiasm - or the degree of emotion we excite in our audience. Many business communicators over-emphasise the logic component of their discourse, at the expense of their overall persuasive potential. Aristotle's genius lay in recognising that all three of these appeals are equally important and potent. He recommended their combined use, identifying that the most persuasive communication harnesses them all.

This advice remains fundamental to GPB's approach and to our clients' successful outcomes, across the economy. So I was somewhat surprised, recently, to stumble across an old *Financial Times* article entitled 'How the Mad Men lost the plot'.<sup>6</sup> It appeared to refute this understanding, specifically in the realm of traditional media advertising, a form of communication which is suspected of not always being entirely effective, as an aphorism attributed to William Lever famously claims: 'Half my advertising is wasted but I don't know which half.'<sup>7</sup>

The Institute of Practitioners in Advertising analysed what it considered the most successful UK adverts of the previous 30 years, claiming the most effective to be 'those with little or no rational content' (Logos).<sup>6</sup> If this were true, then surely Aristotle (and GPB) must have been wrong all along, with only ad agency



Desmond Harney

*"We all have the capability to improve the effectiveness of our own communication"*

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## Of Mice and (Mad) Men contd.

creatives truly understanding the principles of effective persuasion. I soon realised, however, that the article's claims depend upon a particular definition of the word 'successful', and a rather narrow interpretation of the role of advertising. Many of the examples used might well fail the David Ogilvy test (a Mad Man of the golden age) that: 'A good advertisement sells the product without drawing attention to itself.'<sup>8</sup>

Key advertising objectives are delineated by a wide variety of respected authorities and practitioners. *CMO.com*, for example, emphasises 'the (vital) three Cs [...] be clear, credible, and compelling,' where 'credible', relates closely to Aristotle's 'Ethos' trustworthiness appeal, and 'compelling' is covered by a combination of Pathos and Logos.<sup>9</sup> GPB wouldn't argue with this stated need for three Cs, since they so closely match elements of our own (and Aristotle's) suggested approach: communicating concisely, in the best way possible.

Some advertising patently does rely on emotional messaging (Pathos) to an extent, and this can help to make it resonant and 'sticky', or memorable. Retailer John Lewis must believe this, given the nature of their recent Christmas campaigns, which are referenced by the aforementioned FT article. Remember, though, that their heart-tugging ads do not stand in splendid isolation (unlike Steinbeck). They are built upon the shoulders of a long-established Ethos and Logos driven positioning and tagline: 'Never Knowingly Undersold'. John Lewis's customers largely trust the organisation. They also appreciate the commercial logic of a guaranteed refund. Ultimately, they're

persuaded by communication that harnesses all three persuasive appeals, not just Pathos. The retailer claims seasonal sales uplifts ahead of the department store market sector.<sup>10</sup> But they're certainly not achieving that performance based purely on communication 'with little or no rational content,' which is not a communication model we would endorse.

Aristotle's long-established,

and now highly researched and substantiated, balanced approach survives this particular 21<sup>st</sup> century challenge. Don't let your communication 'gang aft agley'<sup>11</sup> (go awry) like Mr. Lever's advertising. To maximise your persuasive power, to influence people's thinking *and* behaviour, we advise you continue with the tried and tested approach of over two millennia, of using a blend of all three appeals: Ethos, Pathos and Logos. Leave emotive, Pathos-only messaging strictly to the award-seeking (M)Ad Men!



A montage of images from John Lewis's recent Christmas TV advertising. Credit: www.joe.ie.

1. Steinbeck, J. (1975), *A Life in Letters*, E. Steinbeck and R. Wallsten (eds.), London: Penguin Group.
2. Gibson, O. (2005, November 19), 'Shopper's eye view of ads that pass us by,' *The Guardian*.
3. Vigo, J. (2019, June 18), 'The Changing Culture of Media Advertisements,' *Forbes*.
4. Aristotle (2018), *Rhetoric*, trans. C. D. C. Reeve, Cambridge MA: Hackett Publishing Company.
5. Petty, R. E. and J. T. Cacioppo (1986), *Communication and Persuasion: Central and Peripheral Routes to Attitude Change*, Berlin: Springer-Verlag, p. 4.
6. Leslie, I. (2015, November 6), 'How the Mad Men lost the plot,' *Financial Times*.
7. Lever, W., in J. S. Wright and J. E. Mertes (1976), *Advertising's Role in Society*, Eagan, MN: West Publishing Co., p. 78.
8. Ogilvy, D. (1963), *Confessions of an Advertising Man*, New York: Atheneum.
9. Cupman, J. (2016, November 28), '4 "Must-Measures" To Gauge Advertising Effectiveness,' *CMO.com*.
10. Jahshan, E. (2019, January 10), 'John Lewis Partnership's Christmas Sales Growth Fails to Improve Profit Outlook,' *Retail Gazette*.
11. Burns, R. (1785), 'To a Mouse, on Turning Her Up in Her Nest With the Plough'.

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# Plan and Prepare to Maximise Audience Motivation

gpb



Lynda Russell-Whitaker

Lynda Russell-Whitaker explores how to appeal to different learning styles when presenting

Depending on who your audience is (and whether you will know this prior to your presentation) you might want to think about how to be inclusive in the presentation that you're giving, for a number of reasons, but for the purpose of this article, in order to maximise their motivation. If their boss has told them to attend, the motivation at the beginning of your presentation may only be extrinsic.

One way to be inclusive with your audience is to consider how individuals learn or absorb information. A popular way of thinking about differences - and in turn being inclusive - among audience members is to use the VARK learning styles inventory. VARK was first developed in 1987 by Neil Fleming, and measures four perceptual preferences: Visual; Aural/auditory; Read/write; Kinaesthetic.

As explained on their website, 'VARK tells you something about yourself [and others] that you may or may not know. [...] It is a short, simple inventory that has been well-received because its dimensions are intuitively understood and its applications are practical. It help[s] people understand each other and assists them to learn more effectively in many situations.'<sup>1</sup>

Two thirds of us fall into the category of 'multimodal' (also referred to as 'Type Two' by VARK). That means that, up to a point, we can adapt or change our learning styles according to either our preferences or the apparent preference of the person delivering the presentation. The chart below demonstrates the percentages of people who have a single perceptual preference, and those who have more. Of the 35% of people who are unimodal, 4% have visual preferences, 8% aural, 9% prefer reading and writing, and 14% are kinaesthetic.

The more your awareness is raised of people's preferences, the more you can cater to your audience members. Whether or not you as the presenter have, say, a strong visual preference, you still need to consider how each individual might prefer to receive,

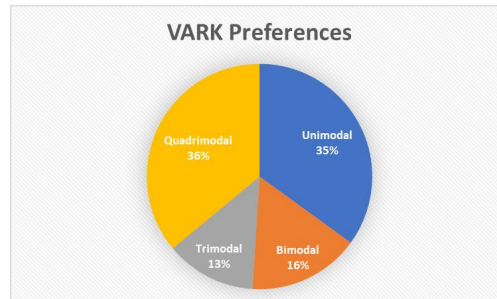


Chart created using data from VARK: [www.vark-learn.com](http://www.vark-learn.com).

process and absorb the information you present to them. This provides you with an opportunity when giving a presentation to use a variety of means and media.

It is therefore helpful to prepare and plan your content for any speaking event with this in mind as, among other benefits, using the VARK principles has the potential to maximise the motivation of your audience. Following the VARK system, you might want to consider using a mix of resources, such as:

- **Visual:** video clips; charts, diagrams and illustrations
- **Aural/Auditory:** podcast extracts
- **Read/write:** written handouts
- **Kinaesthetic:** demonstrations/practicals; discussions between you and your audience (and perhaps between themselves).

Using these resources and activities could help to keep an audience more engaged in your topic. Some people are strongly kinaesthetic. This means that if you can't get them moving about, you need to show them videos and photos, or do demonstrations, rather than just showing illustrations and diagrams. Such content can be aimed at the more visually motivated among us.

For those with a strong read/write preference, written handouts are very helpful. You could also provide a recording of your talk, as any members who are dyslexic, or whose native tongue isn't English, might have an auditory preference or adapt, if they are multi-modal.

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## Plan and Prepare to Maximise Audience Motivation contd.

### Our Services

Grant Pearson Brown Consulting Ltd is a respected adviser based in London. We enhance the performance of businesses, helping clients to excel in the use of the spoken and written word, improving the performance of individuals and teams. Over the long term our work improves the way a firm does business.

We coach and advise individuals to perform at their best in the toughest situations including: Presentations, New Business Pitches, Business Development, Negotiating, Media Interviews, Telephone Calls and Document Writing.

We also produce scientific voice, visual and content analysis reports, which are unique to GPB. We then provide voice and visual coaching, and content advice.

Our clients' needs are the only focus of our work; we listen to them and closely tailor our response to deliver first class coaching and advice. In support of this we selectively pursue new ideas and approaches, continually hone our advice and create tools such as:

- Voice, Visual and Content Analyses,
- Prospect Relationship Management (PRM),
- the Information Iceberg,
- Client s' Rights Act,
- Feature, Benefit Impact (FBI),
- Buyers' Criteria Analysis, (BCA), and
- our Q&A Methodology.

If you're a regular *SpeakUp!* reader you will know about research scientists and professors, Petty and Cacioppo, and their findings with regards to ability and motivation in their Elaboration Likelihood Model of persuasion (see Des's article).<sup>2</sup>

It is a system they developed in 1980, which addresses an audience's response to any act of persuasion, which commonly included using a presentation. Also referred to as 'The Two Routes to Persuasion', Petty and Cacioppo made a distinction between the 'Central' and 'Peripheral' routes (see table below), asserting that in the absence of *both* a high level of motivation to learn *and* high ability or knowledge in the subject matter, the presenter must employ the peripheral route.

CENTRAL ROUTE	PERIPHERAL ROUTE
The APPEAL to LOGIC i.e. strength of argument	The APPEAL to EMOTIONS e.g. impactful speaking style and vocal attractiveness
Requires BOTH: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ability to elaborate</li> <li>• Motivation to elaborate to succeed</li> </ul>	Is chosen if EITHER: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ability to elaborate</li> <li>• Motivation to elaborate are absent</li> </ul>
(The APPEAL to ETHOS A prerequisite for either route to work)	

Two Routes to Persuasion

Yes, facts and figures are important, as is a strong argument. But too often, we forget the other elements that are also crucial to persuading your audience. These elements comprise what they call the '*peripheral route*': how we come across, whether vocally or the way we look; our facial expressions; and our eye contact with members of the audience. All of these are factors that play a key part in how much an audience is engaged with, and persuaded by, our subject, as well as how much information they will recall and, hopefully, accurately retell.

By considering an individual's learning preferences you can further enhance both their ability and their motivation to process the information you are presenting to them. Then consider the variety of formats available to you.

It's also worth paying attention to your choice of language style. Those of us who say 'I see what you mean' are likely to have a strong visual preference, whilst someone who says 'I hear what you're saying' might be more auditory.

Here are a couple of ideas on how you might prepare to make your presentations more inclusive:

#### Get to know your own learning preferences:

Record yourself and listen for clues about your VARK preference. This is useful in many ways, not least to make sure that you don't favour only your own preference when preparing and delivering a pitch or presentation of any kind (to colleagues or externally).

#### Research your audience as much as you are able:

What are their professions? What outside interests do they have? A keen sportsperson *may* have some strong kinaesthetic tendencies and preferences, while musicians *may* be more auditory.

Your presentation can surely be improved by considering these suggestions, and it should make the experience more enjoyable and effective for all, in terms of engagement, memory and presentation.

1. VARK: A Guide to Learning Preferences. [www.varlearn.com](http://www.varlearn.com).
2. Petty, R. E. and J. T. Cacioppo (1986), *Communication and Persuasion: Central and Peripheral Routes to Attitude Change*, Berlin: Springer-Verlag.



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