



Desmond Harney

Adopting the Seven Rhetorical Canons for successful persuasion

Des looks to The Beautiful Game for communication tips

Recently the business of football (*“the only global sport in the world [sic] with more than four billion fans”*¹⁾) inadvertently gave us some insights into the importance of prioritising effective communication. On Sunday 18th April, media rumours and leaks were followed by an official launch announcement of the glitzy, high-value football venture, The European Super League (ESL). Less than three days later, that proposed new enterprise was effectively dead and buried.

What went so wrong so fast? And can we learn from this example to improve our communication effectiveness? I’ll reference GPB’s (Magnificent) Seven Rhetorical Canons to explore how a more methodical approach could have benefited ESL’s launch strategy case.

*“For many years the wealthiest, biggest clubs in Europe have used the threat of a breakaway Super League as a negotiating tactic”*². So when an announcement was made about ESL’s imminent launch, just hours ahead of a planned press conference scheduled by European football’s governing body (UEFA), it was just assumed by

many to be the start of yet another round of very public negotiation by those ‘biggest clubs’. That they would use this tactic to try to secure increased control of UEFA’s Champions League tournament (UCL) - and its revenues.

Since agreement appeared to have already been reached between UEFA and the clubs on a planned UCL expansion, it also seemed some of them had been

acting in bad faith in those discussions - which may have tainted ESL’s reception.

There’s normally a delicate power balance in play between UEFA and the major clubs. The latter are effectively products within UEFA’s attractive brand portfolio. With their allure combined into a single competitive tournament, they are like cat-nip to some advertisers and sponsors. Even though each stand-alone club holds comparatively little appeal internationally. However, after more than a year of Covid-reduced club revenues, something seemed to have shifted in that power balance.

Frustrated by an ever-present financial risk (of potential failure to requalify annually for the lucrative UCL) twelve of the world’s biggest football clubs (six English, three Spanish and three Italian) decided to combine their appeal into a rival, break-away competition. Only they and three further un-named founding clubs, plus five hand-picked invited guest clubs, would qualify for ESL each year. It was to be a direct replacement for UCL. But, critically, with these clubs

themselves controlling all revenues.

The breakaway twelve are all in

the top 16 of Forbes’s 2021 list of the world’s most valuable football clubs, where their combined worth is given as US\$34.4 billion. It was relatively easy then for critics to define ESL as a project for the benefit of football’s ‘Haves’ at the expense of its relative ‘Have-Nots’.

ESL was clearly the result of detailed discussion, planning and negotiation amongst The Twelve. Yet, despite this,

By failing to adopt the Seven Rhetorical Canons, ESL delivered an abject, high profile own-goal - and “an international political incident”

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Adopting the Seven Rhetorical Canons for successful persuasion

By Desmond Harney

Des looks at how we can develop more persuasive communication using these Rhetorical Canons.

Speaking Virtually

By Lynda Russell-Whitaker

Lynda discusses the voice and how we can make the most of it by developing pitch modulation and range, loudness and more.

In quibus confidimus: In whom we trust

By Ewan Pearson

Ewan reviews trust as a topic, why people lose it and how to develop it.

New resources for you

By the GPB Team

GPB introduces some new resources, including our new Doodly videos and Dictionary of Acronyms.

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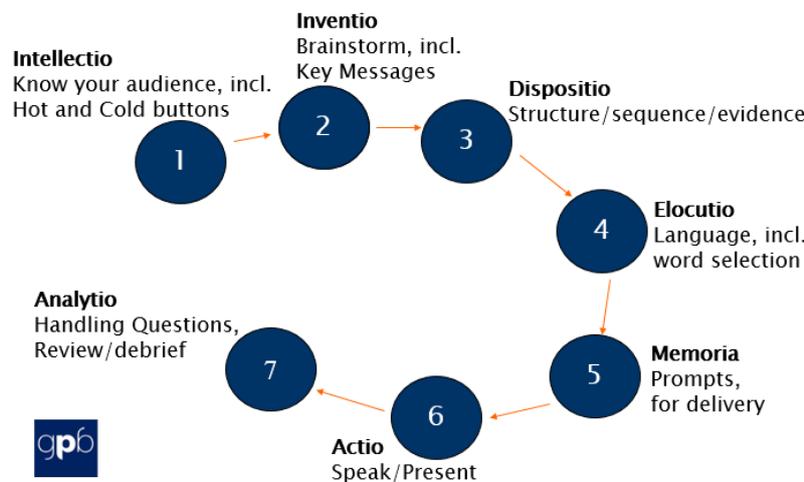
Adopting the Seven Rhetorical Canons for successful persuasion (cont..)

by failing to systematically adopt the Seven Rhetorical Canons as the basis of their persuasive approach, The Twelve delivered an abject, high profile, own-goal of a launch - and “*an international political incident*”³. Thus illustrating for us all the potential cost of failure to develop thorough communication plans.

The image below outlines the Seven Rhetorical Canons methodology GPB has developed. Building on the works of Aristotle and others, it helps our clients to develop more compelling, persuasive communication. Let’s begin with **Canon 1**: to consider the make up of your audience FIRST. This is the logical start point. It’s likely that not doing so thoroughly enough was one of ESL’s first mistakes.

Messages with which to persuade them (**Canon 2**). Developing the appropriate structure, sequence and evidence to optimise your persuasive case will then be more difficult (**Canon 3**). As will choosing the most appropriate and persuasive language (**Canon 4**). Then deciding how best to present your case - and through which channels and forums - will become more problematic (**Canon 6**). **Canon 5** is less directly relevant to the ESL story, but it can also be an important factor. It’s discussed in previous GPB Journals. Questions will, however, also be harder to anticipate and handle well (**Canon 7**). If ESL had identified their audience’s complexity and potential hostility better in advance, they might well have decided not to launch at all.

The Seven Rhetorical Canons



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Who exactly were ESL’s audience? The answer turned out to be a very complex one. Among many, it included: the great football-watching public, a wider public, the sport’s governing international and national bodies, the excluded clubs, sports pundits, media commentators, and governments. Identifying each group’s main motivations (their “Hot and Cold Buttons”) and addressing all of these would require robust analysis.

This first Rhetorical Canon is essential. Getting it wrong risks undermining efforts in the later Canons. E.g. If you don’t accurately map your audience and their motivations, you’ll struggle to brainstorm and identify the best Key

ESL’s sub-optimal analysis of its audience rapidly became clear. Faced with a statement short on detail, but with a vague assertion that ESL’s intent was “*to save football*”⁴ its opponents were immediately able to rubbish that claim. ESL’s proponents lacked the credible arguments and trusted status needed to gain popular support. Instead, it found

itself vociferously opposed by a more powerful, influential, credible (and yet perhaps unlikely) informal coalition.

That coalition included a former England captain (Alan Shearer – plus other high profile TV pundits and former players), a future king (Prince William, President of the FA), the UK government (via its Prime Minister and Culture Secretary) and its main opposition party, football authorities and, it seemed, most English football fans and players (the clubs’ employees). Meanwhile German clubs, part-owned by and more answerable to their fans, were notably absent from this group of self-titled “*Best Clubs*”⁵.

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Adopting the Seven Rhetorical Canons for successful persuasion (cont..)

Far from having 'saving football' at heart, it was easily asserted that ESL was merely a rather cynical attempt to secure the future financial health of the few clubs at the top. The opposing coalition felt, despite ESL's shallow claims to the contrary, that it posed an existential threat with "*the potential to end the club game, as we know it*"².

If ESL had done its communication planning homework thoroughly, an information and charm offensive would surely have now followed (or even preceded). Anticipating, addressing and defusing most of its opponents' potential worries and allaying any simmering discontent. Those concerned settled down, expecting to experience a highly coordinated well-planned response. But it never came.

Instead we witnessed the media equivalent of tumbleweeds. Not only did ESL's audience analysis appear poor but, compounding matters further, there also seemed to be no meaningful communication plan to follow-up or develop that initial, bald statement of intent. There was little attempt to speak or present (**Canon 6**). A derisory two-page ESL website did appear⁵, but there were few human voices backing its woolly, abstract, disembodied words.

Florentino Pérez (Real Madrid President and ESL Chairman) was a notable exception but, tellingly, he belatedly spoke first via a little-watched Spanish digital station. There, he accentuated the negative: stating that 40% of 16-24 year-olds have no interest in football (conveniently ignoring the 60% who do), and also suggesting that the c. 160 year-old tradition of 90-minute fixtures could be abandoned, for a shorter format

better suited to the reduced attention spans of modern youth. Such reactive, limited, off-target responses to the range of negative reactions surfacing was baffling. To students of effective persuasion, the unravelling of the ESL seemed to be imminent – and that's precisely what happened next.



This yellow headline verdict needs little translation. It could have been avoided by ESL (image source: MARCA, 2021)⁸.

Faced with opprobrium and accusations of 'betrayal' (well-chosen emotive language), within 24 hours the signatory clubs began to withdraw from their own agreement. They offered sincere apologies for poor judgment - rather than for "*preposterous arrogance*"⁶ in hatching a "*sinister scheme*"⁷. But the damage had already been done and the communication 'battle' for hearts and minds had

been entirely lost. Leaving the defeated combatants to review and debrief (**Canon 7**) at their leisure.

Perez later mused, "*Maybe we didn't explain it well*" (an understatement), ominously claiming that ESL remains on "*stand-by*"⁴. It would benefit from clearer focus on The Seven Rhetorical Canons in preparing its persuasive case, whenever the next chance arises.

By Desmond Harney

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Advice *squeezed*
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Speaking virtually



Lynda Russell-Whitaker

It is what you say, and the way you say it

Having recently recorded some audio files for GPB's new Doodly (video) series, for this article I thought I would focus on the voice and how we can make the most of it. Like many people, over the past year or more, I've been using my speaking voice in the virtual world far more often than I had previously.

In addition to regular group Zoom calls and MS Teams meetings, I've taught English to speakers of other languages and have hosted a radio show since the start of the year. All these environments can increase our awareness of how we come across to others.

Of course, the visual aspect is very important. However, in an audio-only environment such as radio, the voice becomes the focal point, as it does in a classroom where learners are not fluent in English.

In these situations, all those key vocal aspects we address when coaching public speakers become even more important, i.e. pitch height, pitch range, pitch modulation, loudness, pace and diction, as well as pronunciation. This is not only so that we speak clearly and are understood, it's also to ensure that we are able to engage our audience, keep them interested and even inspired, not just by what we're saying, but how we're saying it.

It's remarkable how much you can learn about your voice and its strengths and weaknesses in a situation where you need to be much more conscious of how you sound. When recording short

audio links, it's an almost immediate feedback loop. We couldn't get into the studio on campus (Royal Holloway University where I'm currently studying for an MRes in Rhetoric and Oratory), no one was able to broadcast their show live. I've had to set up a crude recording studio in my home office. Although not ideal in terms of a controlled environment, this situation has its advantages.



Covid-19 resulted in an increase in the use of MS Teams and Zoom in the business world (Image source: Unsplash, 2021).

The beauty of not broadcasting live is that if I don't like the content, if my diction or pronunciation sounds dubious, or there are distortions, I can re-record the audio. That applies whether it is a link for a show or a section of a podcast interview.

Furthermore, if I think my voice sounds monotonous, it allows me to focus on optimising my pitch modulation and range, along with pacing, pitch height and loudness (though this is not as relevant with amplification).

There are techniques you can use to reduce sibilance (in this context, the hissing sound that can be created when using a microphone) produced by fricatives such as 'f', 's', 'v' and 'z'. The other jarring sounds for listeners that we need to be conscious of are the pops created by unvoiced plosives, such as (in English) 't', 'p' and 'k' as well as voiced plosives 'b', 'd' and 'g'. Other sounds that cause distortion with a microphone are 'th' and 'sh', but 'p' seems to be one of the worst offenders.

We can change scripts to some extent, of course, but it's impossible to avoid these sounds completely. Our voices are all very individual, so we each need

There are techniques you can use... to reduce the sibilance produced by fricatives.

Advice **squeezed** straight from the experts



Speaking virtually (cont...)

to find the microphone position that best suits us. The optimum solution in any situation where you will be using a microphone is, therefore, to do a sound check or test. This is essential if you will be in front of a live audience.

Regarding loudness, bear in mind that it is important for audio levels to be as consistent as possible whilst allowing for some volume range. Keeping your mouth in the same position is important, especially when recording chunks of audio. Not moving your head forwards or backwards or turning left or right whilst speaking should avoid this problem with a static boom mic. The same is true to a lesser extent if you're using a lapel mic.

In a broadcast or podcast environment, you will often be pre-recording. As proximity to the microphone creates more intimacy, along with the fact that the listener will usually be listening on their own, perhaps with ear buds or headphones, distortions to sound quality can become more obvious.

So it's important to strike a balance between that feeling of intimacy and minimising sound distortions that might distract or irritate the listener.

Having a high quality microphone helps, along with the 'head basket' (the wire mesh that surrounds some mics) or other shields, but distortions caused by plosives in particular can be avoided with good

microphone technique. When in a recording studio, placing the mic slightly 'off-axis', i.e. to the side of your mouth, is very effective. You can also position the mic slightly above your mouth. That way, you capture the intimacy and the richness of your voice whilst avoiding the sound from the blasts of air produced by the plosives (aka 'popping') - or fricatives. With practice, it is possible to reduce the amount of air (pops) you produce with these sounds.

There are also bad habits we may not be aware of, such as starting a sentence with a smack of the lips, or making sounds produced when the tongue hits the palate or roof of the mouth (like a small tutting sound) are not uncommon but are unpleasant to hear when amplified.

Try to avoid exhaling through your nose too! These may take a little time to master, but minor tweaks will greatly improve the quality of your audio output and the experience of your listeners in the long-term.

By Lynda Russell-Whitaker



When pre-recording, it is important to keep your mouth in the same position (Image source: Unsplash, 2021).

It's important to strike a balance between that feeling of intimacy and minimising sound distortions that might distract or irritate the listener.

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Advice *squeezed* straight from the experts



In quibus confidimus: In whom we trust



Ewan Pearson

It seems there is almost no category of person left that we can trust. Why? And what can we do to (re)build trust?

On the back of every American one dollar note and coin I have lies the motto "In God we Trust". That probably doesn't work for atheists. And I suspect it may not work either for those who can't understand why God might work in oddly unhelpful, not just mysterious ways, when it comes to some form of personal disaster. I suspect though that it works for many people. For Americans, this motto was added to their notes and coins in April 1864¹, as a constant reference point of moral virtue at a time of turbulence, the Civil War of 1861-5. Secretary Chase had instructed a motto be added "*in the fewest and tersest words possible*". Today we'd call that an Aphorism.

For my title, I have changed one word in the motto from 'God' to 'Whom' as I want to download to you on a rather important aspect of persuasion, trust.

In God we Trust. Aside from Him, it seems that there

is a diminishing list of professions and roles that by status alone suggest we can trust them. Yet Aristotle postulated that such elevated status was itself a big contributor to persuasion (as one part of his Ethos argument).

But long gone are the days when we looked up to Bank Managers as pillars of society. The BBC comedy show of the 1960s & 1970s, Dad's Army, illustrated this by making Captain Mainwaring the butt of many jokes. The loss of status is also true many others: of politicians who we elect to lead us, accountants and lawyers, fund managers, a lot of journalists (in evidence I give you Martin Bashir and the BBC, m'lud), the Police, and religious leaders.

And then of course, somewhere down the list there are investment bankers, estate agents and second-hand car salesmen (they still *are* mostly male). Hence the common pub and shop sign 'In God We Trust: All Others Pay Cash'².

I realise that I am courting disaster here, as most of our clients work in the professions I have just included in the list and I was even an investment banker myself a long time ago, so I'll try to dig myself out of that hole. I am not saying that *everyone* who works in these sectors is bad, and indeed I don't think I have ever had a crook as a client, and even though I've been in this game for nearly 30 years now I have encountered barely enough of such dubious characters to start counting on one hand.

The problem is, to put it metaphorically, that one bad apple spoils the whole barrel, reputation-wise. This leads to the comment "*You can't trust anyone these days*", and we are all supposedly '*on our guard*'. We now get regular government warnings to help train us to spot fakes.

It seems that every sector and profession has had such bad apples: Anyone for Bernie Madoff, or Charles Ponzi and his little get-rich-quick scheme? Anyone *not* had a thousand scam phone calls or emails yet?

The damage done is almost impossible to undo. 'These days' we're on our guard, but we're also uniformed and naïve, so we rely on that great global professional police force, the **Regulators**, brought in to being because you just can't trust people. But reliance on regulators has also caused us to lower our guard, falling back on their help when we get duped. It's a big moral hazard.



'In God We Trust' appears on the American one dollar bill, and others...

Advice *squeezed* straight from the experts



In quibus confidimus: In whom we trust (cont...)

As a result, I have been asking clients who you can trust 'these days'. The consistent and sometimes sole response has been not the government, not the investors or bosses who've kept things going, not the researchers who created Covid-19 vaccines in record time, but the key workers on the front line in the UK's NHS. As a sign of this, in the middle of 2020, much of our nation went outside for ten Thursday 8pms in a row from March to May 2020 and 'clapped for the NHS'.



We tend to be more trusting of key workers as their only motive is to heal and care for others (Image source: Unsplash, 2021).

And yet most of us have had little or no contact with those people. So, we *can* trust others we don't know... up to a point.

I've therefore pondered why we trust these key workers, and generally not others. I think one quick answer comes from *motive*. Not money, personal gain, ego, fame or career enhancement. No big house, sports cars or yachts, except for the very few who make it from Doctor to Consultant. No, their motive is simple: to heal and care for others. They have stood up to the enormous pressure of Covid, working in dangerous conditions for low wages, almost never complaining about their lot, even when it got ridiculous.

Some of you know that I trained as a medic. But despite mixing with a lot of witty, weird and wonderful colleagues, I was not well suited to spending time in buildings full of sick people (aka hospitals and local GP surgeries), so I left. I just didn't have the vocation, but I deeply admire those who do. I don't regret leaving, and - like many - have travelled through several careers, in my case teaching and investment banking,

before finding a job that I really enjoy, and have become almost competent at. Simon Sinek (the author of '*Start with Why*') would surely be pleased with that end result³.

I think that may be why my clients trust my colleagues and me, and why

we each trust them in return. It's not about personal gain, it's about having and fulfilling a purpose. Aristotle nailed it when he wrote about the importance of purpose (Telos). If you do trust someone, it may again be because of their motive to help,

or perhaps a sense that they care about you.

Add to that an attitude for openness and honesty (sometimes admitting fallibility), integrity, a long-term business relationship, likeability, that the person makes sense, that they do a good job, charge reasonable rates and have kept promises, and you have the many main ingredients of Trust Pie. It's a pie that is hard to make and which crumbles away easily.

Perhaps the motto should be "In God we Trust, because you can't trust anyone else" or "In Pie we Trust". I'll leave it to you to decide.

By Ewan Pearson

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New resources for you...

New Doodly videos out now

Many of you have previously worked with GPB, or may be working with us currently. If so, you will be aware that (in simple terms) we provide advice, coaching and training in effective and persuasive communication.

Nonetheless, if you were to ask yourself ‘what **exactly** does GPB do?’, it may be a little more difficult to answer. You will likely be influenced by what you have received from us (or are receiving from us) for example coaching in the use of persuasion in business development. However, you may be surprised to learn that we provide support in a wider range of areas, including: effective online communication, presentations and public speaking, negotiating, business development, media interviews and more.

We have created a series of Doodly videos that correspond with our many coaching areas to help you to prepare for upcoming meetings, presentations, AGMs or other business events. These videos provide a snapshot summary of information as well as some initial tips.

To see them, go to our YouTube channel or look at our website under ‘[what we do](#)’ on our *Business Development and Selling*, *Media training*, *Negotiating to the best outcome*, *Online Communication*, *Presentation and public speaking skills* and *Writing skills* pages.



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Dictionary of Acronyms

Speaking of our website, some of our more popular posts are our Neologisms, Rhetorical Tools and Dictionary of Collective Nouns pages. We have now introduced the Dictionary of Acronyms to our collection.

Our dictionary covers a range of different areas: from computing and humorous internet acronyms to jargon-specific acronyms for the aviation, engineering and medical industries.



Dictionary of Acronyms

GPB Team June 4, 2021

Visit our Dictionary of Acronyms page [here](#)²

At one time or another we have all found ourselves in a situation where we’ve been unable to work out the meaning of an acronym. Take ‘LOL’, laugh out loud? Or lots of love? I guess you could say this one’s context dependent. But with GPB’s new dictionary of acronyms, you won’t find yourself at a loss again.

We are always open to feedback and welcome new acronyms, so if you can think of any that we have missed, let us know!

Linked webpages:

1. <https://www.gpb.eu/>
2. <https://www.gpb.eu/2021/06/elementor-8801.html>

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