

Amy Warren

Communication Skills Trainer ★ I design and deliver training that helps quiet types shine in the spotlight

How Aristotle Can Help You Deliver a Winning Business Pitch

You're on the brink of starting your own business. You've done the market research and know your product has industry-changing potential. You've written a business plan, run the numbers, and made some early sales.

Then you get the call. The venture capitalist wants to hear your pitch.

What do you do?

If you're an entrepreneur who's more comfortable working on your idea than talking about it, then you might be feeling queasy. Maybe you procrastinate on the hard work of creating a persuasive pitch. You might be tempted to wing it.

Don't.

Everyone is capable of delivering a business pitch that results in venture capital, a small business loan, or another form of funding. To do it, you must appeal to ethos, pathos, and logos.

“What's that gibberish?” you ask.

2000-year-old wisdom that never goes out of style

Ethos, pathos, and logos are the three modes of persuasion defined by Aristotle in *Rhetoric*, written around 350 B.C. *Ethos* builds credibility with your audience; *pathos* appeals to emotion; and *logos* addresses (no surprise) logic.

Perhaps you recall these terms from a long-ago speech class. The best speeches brilliantly combine ethos, pathos, and logos. But don't believe for a moment that Aristotelian persuasion belongs only to preachers and presidents. The best pitches are master classes in ethos, pathos,

and logos. Let's look at how you can use these three pillars of persuasion to win the hearts, minds, and trust of funders.

Ethos (credibility)

Credibility is based on trust—the investor or loan officer must trust that you will deliver what you say you'll deliver. Here are three ways to build credibility in your business pitch:

- **Know your stuff.** Who are your customers and competitors? How are you going to be profitable? If you have a solid business plan, you already know the answers to these questions and more. Make it clear you've done your homework.
- **Show your track record.** *Who* you are is just as important as *what* you know. Talk about your track record in other ventures. Highlight early wins like rapid growth or high margins. Prove you have the right team to deliver on your brand promise.
- **Establish common ground.** You can know your stuff and have enviable achievements, yet still leave with nothing. Trust requires a personal connection, which begins with knowing the investor. How does your business align with her goals? How is it a good fit for his portfolio?

A winning pitch will convince a funder that you've done your homework, you're capable of succeeding, and you're an ally.

Pathos (emotion)

Businesspeople fancy themselves rational beings. The world is awash in “just the facts” presentations. But to get people to act, you have to first make them care. Consider doing the following to persuade through emotion:

- **Tell a story.** Storytelling is critical to making people care. The needs of the many might outweigh the needs of the few, but it is the few (or one) we remember. Tell a story about how a customer used your product to solve a problem. A good story makes the funder feel like the hero.
- **Make connections.** Connect your product to other products or concepts through metaphor and simile. This allows you to piggyback on positive emotions evoked by the other product. The movie *Alien* was famously pitched as “*Jaws* on a spaceship”. Sold.
- **Appeal to (higher-level) needs.** This builds on common ground. Show how your business will meet investor needs beyond money. For instance, if the funders are environmentalists, paint a picture of how they'll feel after investing in a company that reduces energy use.

A winning pitch doesn't leave emotion to chance. Make them *feel* like investing in you by using story and metaphor and by appealing to higher-level needs.

Logos (logic)

Logic is more than numbers. Logic means your arguments are reasonable and based on sound analysis. A pitch should **not** leave someone thinking, "Where'd he get that?" Here are several ways to improve the logic of your pitch:

- **Structure your pitch.** A structure is like the foundation of a house. Without it, your stories and data come crashing down. Your audience must follow you from Point A to Point B to Point C, and so on. An example of a pitch structure is: *what* (the opportunity), *so what* (why it matters), and *what now* (next steps).
- **Use strong supporting data.** Without data, your stories are just that—stories. But not all data is created equal. In one glance, the funder should understand the purpose of your table or graph. Avoid cluttered and misleading visuals. Nothing kills credibility faster than meaningless, or worse, deceptive data.
- **Make the (logical) ask.** Once you've established your credibility, evoked the right emotions, and made well-reasoned arguments, it's time to ask for the money. Your "ask" should flow logically from everything you've said. How much are you asking for? How will it be used? What milestones are planned?

It's "sexy" these days to appeal to emotion (is there a bigger buzzword than storytelling?). But a winning pitch will also use structure, data, and a logical ask to make them *think* you're a good bet.

Aristotle would have hated PowerPoint

If all this sounds overwhelming—relax! With a great idea, a solid business plan, and enough passion to power a small city, you're already on your way.

Start gathering material to support ethos, pathos, and logos. Get outside your own head. Talk to your partners. Talk to your customers. Talk to your barista. What do they think will resonate?

Whatever you do, don't open PowerPoint until you know what you'll say and the order in which you'll say it. PowerPoint is a potent visualization tool, but it is **not** a starting point for a pitch. If the first thing you see is that white, duplicative rectangle, your thinking will be similarly constrained.

Winning pitches are more than the sum of their slides. At the end of your pitch, an investor should know in the heart, mind, and gut that you're an opportunity not to be missed.

The 3 Pillars of Persuasion:

Use ethos, pathos, and logos
to deliver a winning business pitch



ETHOS
(Credibility)

Know your stuff.

Show your
track record.

Establish
common ground.



PATHOS
(Emotion)

Tell a story.

Make
connections.

Appeal to
higher-level needs.

thequietspeaker.com



LOGOS
(Logic)

Structure your pitch.

Use strong
supporting data.

Make the
logical ask.