

## Chapter 14

# Persuasive Speaking in a Democratic Society



### CHAPTER OUTLINE

The Anatomy of Public Controversy

Questions of Fact, Value, and Policy

Ethical Proof in Persuasive Speaking

Appealing to Audience Emotions



### Learning Objectives

**14.1** Define *public controversy* and discuss what it means to *deliberate in good faith*.

**14.2** Distinguish among the three different types of persuasive issues: fact, value, and policy.

**14.3** Define *ethos* and discuss what contributes to strong credibility.

**14.4** Discuss the techniques and ethics of appealing to an audience's emotions.

A student urges his fellow students to boycott a speech by a controversial public figure. A public health nurse urges the distribution of condoms in the local high schools. A lawyer argues against imposing limits on the amount of money juries can award in medical malpractice cases. The president of the United States goes on national television to urge public support for his economic policies.

Every day, all sorts of people—from ordinary citizens to world leaders—try to persuade other people. That is, they seek to influence the beliefs, values, or actions of others or “make the case” for a new policy or program. Sometimes you try to persuade others about trivial or purely personal matters. You may persuade a friend to go to a movie, for example, or to take up yoga. In a democracy, however, persuasion takes on greater significance. Persuasion is the chief mechanism through which we select our leaders, determine our civic priorities, resolve controversies and disputes, and choose among various policies. Indeed, the reliance on persuasion rather than force is what most clearly distinguishes a democracy from a dictatorship.

Perhaps you have studied persuasion in another public speaking class. Or you may have studied persuasion in psychology, sociology, or public relations and advertising. In all of these fields, persuasion is important because to understand persuasion is to understand human behavior. In this chapter, however, we are concerned with the role of persuasion in our democratic society. We will consider, first, how public controversies invite persuasion and the sorts of issues we debate as citizens in a democracy. Then we will reflect on some of the means of persuasion and the ethical constraints on persuasion in a democracy.

## The Anatomy of Public Controversy

### 14.1 Define *public controversy* and discuss what it means to *deliberate in good faith*.

**Preview.** *Persuasion is rooted in controversy. We deal with personal controversies every day, but not all controversies involve matters of public importance. When you speak about a public controversy, you have a responsibility to do more than simply express your opinion. As a citizen, you have an obligation to back up your opinions with arguments and evidence and to “test” those opinions in the give-and-take of public debate.*

Prayer in the schools. The future of Social Security. Illegal immigration. Affirmative action. Health care reform. Same-sex marriage. All of these issues spark controversy because people have strong yet conflicting opinions. They are *public* controversies because they affect large numbers of people—and because they require that we make decisions about new laws, how to spend our tax dollars, or what programs and policies to adopt. Not every difference of opinion leads to a public controversy, of course. You may have disagreed with your parents over which college you should attend, or perhaps you have debated with your friends over where to go on spring break. These issues may be important to you personally, but they are not *public* controversies. **Public controversies** involve the choices we must make as *citizens*; they affect the whole community, perhaps even the nation or the world.

Some public controversies literally involve matters of life or death. When we debate whether the government should restrict stem cell research, for example, our decision could affect tens of thousands who potentially may benefit from such research. So, too, do people’s lives hang in the balance when we debate how much aid to send to the scene of a natural disaster or whether to send troops to some trouble spot on the other side of the globe. Obviously, not all public controversies have such grave implications. Sometimes we may address little-known controversies or try to call attention to some problem that we believe has been ignored. In just the past decade or so, for example, we have begun to hear warnings about the environmental hazards posed by “e-waste,”<sup>1</sup> and now we also hear warnings of a new “health care crisis”:

#### public controversies

Controversies that affect the whole community or nation and that we debate and decide in our role as citizens in a democracy.

a projected shortage of trained nurses.<sup>2</sup> Every day, new controversies arise over our nation's economic, social, and political problems and policies. As citizens, we need to participate in public discussions of these important issues. Indeed, that's what it *means* to be a citizen in a democracy: participating in the process of governing ourselves.

Let us begin by reflecting on one recent controversy and what that controversy can teach us about the anatomy—that is, the shape, structure, and parts—of a public controversy. Since at least 2004, there has been an ongoing debate over the use of so-called enhanced interrogation techniques by U.S. military and intelligence personnel in the war against terrorism. Inspired by allegations of torture and prisoner abuse, this debate has pitted former members of the George W. Bush administration against a variety of critics, including Bush's successor as president, Barack Obama. In one of his first major foreign policy addresses as president, Obama denounced "so-called enhanced interrogation techniques" as both ineffective and immoral. "I know some have argued that brutal methods like waterboarding were necessary to keep us safe," he stated. "I could not disagree more." In Obama's view, such methods not only were ineffective, they also undermined the "rule of law," alienated our allies, and served as a "recruitment tool for terrorists." They also risked the lives of American troops by making it less likely that enemy combatants would surrender and more likely that captured Americans would be tortured. Those who defended such techniques were simply "on the wrong side of the debate, and the wrong side of history," Obama argued. "We must leave these methods where they belong—in the past. They are not who we are. They are not America."<sup>3</sup>

On the other side of the debate, former vice president Dick Cheney defended enhanced interrogation techniques as both lawful and effective. According to Cheney, the legal authority for such methods was drawn from the Constitution and from a congressional resolution authorizing the Bush administration to use "all necessary and appropriate force" to protect the American people after the 9/11 attacks. Calling the interrogations "legal, essential, justified, successful, and the right thing to do," Cheney insisted that such methods were used only on "hardened terrorists" after "other efforts failed," and he claimed that the information gathered had prevented the "violent death of thousands, if not hundreds of thousands, of innocent people." From the start, Cheney explained, "there was only one focused and all-important purpose" for the interrogations, and that was to obtain "specific information on terrorist plans." That purpose was fulfilled and terrorist plots were "averted." To rule out such techniques in the future, Cheney concluded, would be "recklessness" and "make the American people less safe."<sup>4</sup>

Like most complex public controversies, the debate over enhanced interrogation techniques raised a number of factual questions: What sorts of interrogation techniques were actually employed by U.S. agents, and what exactly did waterboarding and other such methods entail? How many alleged terrorists were subjected to such techniques, and what information was obtained from them? How, if at all, did that information help the United States avert terrorist attacks? Was President Obama right that such methods hurt America's reputation around the world and helped to recruit new terrorists? Or was Dick Cheney right that such methods are necessary to save innocent lives? Beyond these questions, the whole controversy raised larger, more difficult questions about the legal and ethical justifications for such actions. Did the Bush administration have the legal authority to authorize such techniques? What rights, if any, do alleged terrorists have? In time of war, are such methods really necessary to protect our national security? Are they morally justifiable? These are just a few of the larger and more difficult questions raised by the debate.

In today's political climate, some people inevitably try to exploit such controversies for personal or political gain. On talk radio and TV debate shows, politicians and representatives of various special interests put their own spin on the controversy, eager to score points. For most Americans, however, the debate over enhanced interrogation methods was not about who might gain the political advantage. Rather, it

was about finding the truth and striking the right balance between equally worthy goals—upholding our ideals and protecting our national security. Unfortunately, answers to the factual, legal, and political questions raised by the controversy were neither simple nor obvious. Historians will someday judge whether the Bush administration acted properly in authorizing such methods. But the larger issue will always be with us: how far are we willing to go to protect our national security?


As citizens in a democracy, we have a right to our opinions on such controversial issues. If we express those opinions in public, however, we assume a greater responsibility—the responsibility to back up our opinions with *arguments*. By speaking out in public, we also invite those who disagree to speak out as well. As citizens, we have an ethical obligation to respond sincerely and respectfully to those who accept that invitation. The success of our democracy depends on our willingness to subject our ideas to the scrutiny of public debate—and to be open-minded and respectful toward those who disagree.

## Deliberating in Good Faith

### deliberating “in good faith”

Debating and discussing controversial issues in a spirit of mutual respect, with a commitment to telling the truth, backing up arguments with sound reasoning and evidence, and remaining open to changing one’s mind.

In Chapter 1, we introduced the phrase **deliberating “in good faith.”** Among other things, we noted that deliberating in good faith means making *arguments* in support of your opinions. But what is a good argument? What does deliberating in good faith mean in terms of your responsibilities as a speaker?

**First, it means telling the truth, at least as you see**  our beliefs and opinions may not always turn out to be right. Yet speakers who *deliberately* misrepresent the facts or speakers who publicly advocate ideas that they do not *sincerely* believe are not merely mistaken; they are unethical. They deserve to be condemned by all who value free speech and reasoned debate.

**Second, deliberating in good faith means backing up your personal opinions with evidence and reasoning.** In public debate, you have an obligation not only to be honest but also to *prove* your claims. Proving one’s claim does *not* mean presenting conclusive or irrefutable evidence; it does *not* mean settling an issue once and for all. It *does* mean presenting a *reasonable* argument—one at least worthy of serious consideration and further debate.

**Third, deliberating in good faith means accepting your burden of proof, or your responsibility to meet a certain standard of proof in a particular context.** Perhaps you have heard the phrase *burden of proof* in a legal context. In a courtroom, the burden of proof refers to the level of proof necessary for the prosecution to win the case. Depending on the type of case, that burden of proof may range from a *preponderance of the evidence*—the standard typical in a civil case—to the much higher standard required in criminal cases: *beyond a reasonable doubt*. In public debate, the burden of proof is not so clearly defined, yet we expect some advocates to meet a higher standard of proof than others. As in the courtroom, those who accuse others of wrongdoing carry a heavier burden of proof than those who speak in self-defense. Likewise, those who advocate new policies carry a heavier burden of proof than those who defend well-established or existing policies. After all, the existing policy at least has a track record, and there is always some risk to trying something new. In public debate, of course, there will be no judge to instruct you on your burden of proof or to enforce the rules of debate. Nevertheless, it is important that you understand the expectations and standards of proof in public debate.

We will return to the practical implications of meeting your burden of proof in Chapter 15. For now, it is enough to understand that public deliberations, like courtroom debates, are governed by *rules*, and you should strive to live up to those rules—however irresponsible or unconstrained other speakers may seem. No doubt you have seen speakers attack their political opponents, cite dubious evidence, or stir up ugly emotions. That does not mean you should resort to the same tactics. The fact that other

### burden of proof

The standards or expectations that define a “reasonable argument” in a particular situation, or the proof necessary to warrant serious consideration and further debate over an advocate’s claims.

#### Deliberating in Good Faith

What does it mean to deliberate “in good faith”? Do you think that most politicians today deliberate in good faith? What about political commentators and representatives of interest groups and “think tanks” that you hear on radio or TV talk shows? Do they deliberate in good faith?



The “rules” of democratic deliberation often break down on TV talk shows, where participants sometimes seem more interested in “scoring points” than in finding common ground.

speakers may be irresponsible is all the more reason for you to uphold higher standards. By following the rules yourself, you can set a good example and contribute to more constructive public discussion.

## Questions of Fact, Value, and Policy

### 14.2 Distinguish among the three different types of persuasive issues: fact, value, and policy.

**Preview.** *Persuasive issues revolve around questions of fact (what is true), value (what is good or bad), and policy (what we should do in the future). As you prepare to speak about a particular topic, you need to identify the types of issues surrounding that topic and focus your efforts on unresolved controversies.*

### Is That the Truth?

Normally, we use the word *fact* to describe something that is already established as true. We think of a fact as something that we can just look up in a reference book or that we can establish by using the appropriate measurement device. Thus, we may say that it is a fact that Peru is in Latin America or that it is currently 80 degrees—based on a thermometer reading. These are not the sorts of facts that are disputed or debated. In ordinary usage, a fact is something that we all agree is true.

On many occasions, however, we disagree over the facts relating to a particular subject, and we discuss and debate what may or may not be “true.” Does the Loch Ness Monster really exist? How many people are currently unemployed in this country? Do artificial sweeteners cause cancer? What might account for an increase in the number and severity of hurricanes in recent years? These are the sorts of issues where the “facts” themselves are in dispute. Many public controversies, such as the debate over Social Security and disagreements over the causes of climate change, rest on unresolved or debatable questions of fact.

A **question of fact** typically involves issues of existence, scope, or causality. We would address a controversy over *existence* if, for example, we tried to persuade our audience that the ivory-billed woodpecker, a bird once thought extinct, still survives in

#### **question of fact**

A debatable question about existence, scope, or causality.

remote forests of the American Southeast. Issues of *scope* may emerge in debates over how many Americans are unemployed or the extent of a flu epidemic, whereas we debate *causality* when we disagree over the causes of juvenile delinquency or the epidemic of obesity in the United States. In addition to involving different sorts of questions, some factual controversies may revolve around questions about the past (How many people have died from breast cancer in the past decade?), whereas others may involve predictions about the future (Will the Obama administration's plan for tuition-free community college create a better-trained workforce and help solve the student debt crisis, as the president promised in his 2015 State of the Union address?).<sup>5</sup>

Whatever the specific focus, issues of fact invite empirical proof: real examples, statistics, and testimony from experts. In addition, we typically try to resolve questions of fact *before* we debate questions of value or policy. If, for example, we cannot agree about the existence or causes of climate change, it makes little sense to discuss possible solutions. Similarly, before we debate how best to control illegal immigration, we should first answer some factual questions: How many immigrants enter America illegally each year? Where and how do they enter the country? And what motivates them to risk arrest or even death to get into the United States? Again, an analogy to courtroom debates may help clarify how controversies evolve. In a criminal trial, lawyers must first establish the *facts of the case*. Only then do they debate which laws may have been violated. And only after the court has decided that the law has, in fact, been broken do the lawyers debate the appropriate sentence. In public controversies, the rules are less clearly defined, but the process is essentially the same: only after we have resolved major factual controversies does it make sense to debate how to *evaluate* those facts or how to *act* in response.

## Is This Good or Bad?

### question of value

A debatable question about whether an idea or action is good or bad, right or wrong, just or unjust, moral or immoral.

A **question of value** focuses on what we consider good or bad, right or wrong, just or unjust, and moral or immoral. Questions of value focus not just on what we believe to be true but what we consider appropriate, legal, ethical, or moral. Advocates of animal rights try to persuade us that medical experiments on animals are morally wrong, for example, whereas their opponents deem them necessary to save human lives. Opponents of affirmative action contend that racial preferences violate our commitment to equal treatment under the law, whereas those who favor such preferences deem them necessary to “level the playing field.” In both of these debates, it is not so much the facts that are in dispute as the differing *values* applied to those facts by the advocates involved. That is what debates over questions of value are all about: determining how we should *evaluate* specific facts, ideas, or actions.

In a courtroom, the law itself provides the general principles we use to evaluate facts. Yet it is not always clear which laws ought to apply in a particular case, and the meaning of the law itself is sometimes in dispute. Once they have determined the facts of the case, for example, lawyers in a murder trial still might debate whether the facts warrant a verdict of first- or second-degree murder. Outside the courtroom, the general principles or criteria that we use to evaluate ideas and actions are even more diverse and unsettled—and hence more “debatable.” During the civil rights debates of the 1960s, for example, some people condemned civil rights protestors for deliberately breaking local laws that segregated the races in the South, whereas the activists themselves invoked “higher laws”—the Constitution’s guarantee of equal rights under the law, for example, or even “God’s law” that all people are created equal.

How do we choose and define the general principles that we employ in value arguments? In some cases, we may find such principles written in a law book or in a professional code of ethics. In other cases, we might rely on reputable authorities to suggest the appropriate principles or criteria of judgment. If we wish to judge the constitutionality of a particular action, for example, we may consult with experts in

constitutional law. If we wish to render a moral judgment, we should consult whomever our audience considers a credible moral authority—a religious leader, perhaps, or maybe a well-known philosopher or ethicist. In many cases, the best source of the standards or criteria we employ in our arguments will be the audience itself because such arguments work best when they are grounded in our listeners' own value systems. Only after we have convinced our audience that a problem exists or that some wrong has been done does it make sense to move on to the highest level of controversy: issues of policy.

## What Are We Going to Do?

A **question of policy** has to do with our actions in the future: there is something wrong in our world, and we need to correct it; we have a problem that needs to be solved. Yet even when we agree that we have a problem, we still may not agree about how best to solve it. In our complex society, we inevitably have a variety of options for addressing various problems. And in considering each option, we must weigh not only its effectiveness in solving the problem but also its costs, its feasibility, and any advantages or disadvantages that it might have.

We may all agree that health care for the uninsured in the United States poses serious challenges. Yet the Obama administration's solution to that problem—the Affordable Care Act, or so-called Obamacare—remains controversial. Critics on the left complain that Obamacare falls short of universal health care coverage, while many on the right still label Obamacare a government “takeover” of the health insurance industry. Likewise, everybody seems to agree that our current income tax system should be reformed. Still, we debate a wide variety of policy alternatives, ranging from minor changes in the existing tax code to a “flat tax” or even a national sales tax that would eliminate income taxes altogether.

Even when we all agree on a particular approach to some problem, we may find ourselves debating the details of implementation, financing, or administration. We may agree that wealthy nations should do more to fight the spread of AIDS or the Ebola virus in developing nations. But exactly how much should the United States contribute to that effort? And where should our aid go? People worried about the effects of television on children likewise seem to agree that there are problems with children's programming. But does that mean we need more government regulations? What should those regulations say, and how would they be enforced? And how, if at all, do we balance the protection of children with the rights of those who produce and advertise on children's television?

Whatever issues you address in your speeches, it is important that those choices be grounded in thorough research and analysis of both your topic and your audience. Controversies evolve, and what were once hotly contested issues may no longer be seriously debated. At one time, for example, there was a vigorous debate over whether cigarette smoking caused cancer—a question of fact. That debate has largely been settled now, of course, and the debate over smoking now revolves around questions of policy: Should smoking be banned in more public places? Should tobacco companies be held liable for the health costs of smoking? In some persuasive speeches, your sole purpose may be to establish a disputed fact, whereas in other speeches, your audience may already agree that there is a serious problem. In that case, you can focus on policy issues. Whatever your purpose, it should reflect the current status of the public controversy surrounding your topic and the existing beliefs and opinions of your audience.

**It is important that you make your persuasive purpose clear when you speak.**

Given the nature of the issue and the existing attitudes of your audience, do you hope merely to stimulate their thinking—that is, to get a previously apathetic or indifferent audience thinking about some issue?

### question of policy

A debatable question about what policy or program we should adopt or what course of action we should take.

## Highlighting the Challenge of Persuading Others

### Will You Give Blood?

In a study of people's willingness to donate blood, a group of people reluctant to donate were asked to listen to a powerfully emotional speech, delivered by a young hemophiliac. Immediately following the speech, a questionnaire revealed an impressive change in attitudes. More than 70 percent of those who previously had refused to give blood now indicated that they *would* donate blood if given the opportunity! Yet when

presented with official Red Cross blood donation sign-up cards, nearly 80 percent of those with "changed" attitudes *still* declined to commit themselves to the *action* of donating blood. The authors concluded from this study that it is one thing to change minds, but motivating people to *act* is a much greater challenge.

**SOURCE:** Patricia Hayes Andrews and John E. Baird Jr., *Communication for Business and the Professions*, 6th ed. (Madison, WI: Brown & Benchmark, 1995), 359–60.

#### Questions of Fact, Value, and Policy

What are the differences between questions of fact, value, and policy? Can you think of a major public controversy today that mostly revolves around questions of fact? Can you identify other controversies that focus more on questions of value or policy?

Or do you aspire to change minds, persuading listeners to reconsider their opinions?

Do you hope to inspire your audience to *act* in some way, perhaps by sending money to some organization or volunteering their time?

As you might imagine, getting people to *do* something is harder than getting them merely to *think* about it.

## Ethical Proof in Persuasive Speaking

### 14.3 Define *ethos* and discuss what contributes to strong credibility.

**Preview.** *Since ancient times, theorists of persuasion have recognized three broad categories or "modes" of proof: ethos, pathos, and logos. We begin our examination of the modes of proof with ethos, or ethical proof, which refers to the audience's perception of the credibility of the speaker and his or her sources. The constituents of strong ethos are trustworthiness, competence, open-mindedness, and dynamism. Your ethos as a speaker is shaped by the content, structure, and clarity of your speech as well as by how you deliver it.*

Have you ever responded negatively to a speech, only to realize later that it was not the content of the speech that bothered you so much as the person delivering it? Perhaps the speaker's voice irritated you. Or maybe the speaker belonged to a group or political organization that you have always distrusted. On the other hand, you may also have followed someone's advice not so much because he or she gave you good reasons, but because that person seemed knowledgeable and trustworthy. For good or ill, we all react to messages on the basis not only of what is said but of who says it. The perception we have of a speaker—whether that perception is positive or negative—constitutes that person's **ethos**.

Students of public speaking have long recognized the importance of ethos. More than 2,000 years ago, the Greek rhetorician and philosopher Aristotle identified the speaker's character, intelligence, and goodwill as the most important dimensions of ethos.<sup>6</sup> Later theorists have refined and modified Aristotle's original concept. Modern researchers have stressed that ethos depends on what an audience *thinks* about the speaker, and they have noted that people sometimes have very different *perceptions* of the same speaker. In other words, ethos refers to *how the audience sees a speaker*, not to the actual intelligence or character of that person.

*Ethos* is not the same thing as *ethics*, but the two concepts are closely related. A person who is perceived as ethical has a good reputation—a positive ethos—even before he or she speaks. If, on the other hand, a speaker is perceived as unethical, we may find his or her arguments less convincing. Whatever the speaker's true ethical commitments, what is important, again, is our *perception* of the speaker.

#### ethos

The ancient Greek term for ethical proof, or the audience's perception of the speaker's credibility, intelligence, and motives.



Scholars have identified several specific qualities that influence our perceptions of a speaker.<sup>7</sup> From their research, we can identify four major qualities that contribute to a positive ethos:

- Trustworthiness
- Competence
- Open-mindedness
- Dynamism

## Trustworthiness

Not surprisingly, we are more likely to listen to and act on the advice of people who we think are honest and concerned about our best interests. Integrity and sincerity are qualities that inspire trust. Suppose, for example, you were trying to decide what to do after you graduate from college. An older friend whom you trust—a teacher, a counselor, or a family friend—suggests that you join Teach for America, a program in which college graduates spend two years teaching in public schools in economically depressed areas. You are more likely to take this advice if you believe this person not only is knowledgeable about the program but also has your best interests at heart.

Public figures rely heavily on perceptions of their trustworthiness to persuade listeners. In 1986, for example, President Ronald Reagan survived the biggest scandal of his career by assuring Americans that he had *tried* to do the right thing in trading arms for American hostages being held in Iran. In his 1987 State of the Union address, Reagan admitted his mistakes but asked Americans to *trust* that his intentions were good:

I have one major regret. I took a risk with regard to our action in Iran. It did not work, and for that I assume full responsibility. The goals were worthy. I do not believe it was wrong to try to establish contacts with a country of strategic importance or try to save lives. And certainly it was not wrong to try to secure freedom for our citizens held in barbaric captivity. But we did not achieve what we wished and serious mistakes were made trying to do so.<sup>8</sup>

Reagan survived the so-called Iran-Contra affair because of his strong personal ethos.

In contrast to Reagan, former Illinois governor Rod Blagojevich inspired only skepticism and ridicule when he denied any wrongdoing following his arrest on federal corruption charges on December 9, 2008. Accused of trying to “sell” the U.S. Senate seat vacated by Barack Obama, Blagojevich was impeached and removed from office by the Illinois Senate, despite more than a dozen TV appearances and a



"Oh, he's jolly enough, but he lacks credibility."

SOURCE: Reprinted by permission from [www.cartoonstock.com](http://www.cartoonstock.com).

47-minute “closing argument” before the senators themselves. In proclaiming his innocence, Blagojevich insisted that he “never, ever intended to violate the law” and that there was “no evidence, zero” that he had done so. Yet not a single senator rose to his defense, and he was impeached by a unanimous vote, with senators calling him a “devious, cynical, crass, and corrupt politician” and an “unusually good liar.”<sup>9</sup> In *Time* magazine, commentator James Poniewozik compared Blagojevich to one of those “bad auditioners” on *American Idol*: “Does he really have no idea how he sounds to other people? It’s gotta be an act, right?”<sup>10</sup> Obviously, Blagojevich had lost the *trust* of his fellow politicians; his personal ethos had been destroyed.

## Competence

Listeners tend to be persuaded more easily by speakers they view as intelligent, well informed, or personally competent. Whether it comes from native intelligence, education and training, or firsthand experience, the perceived competence of a speaker is a crucial part of his or her ethos. Indeed, competence is often *the* issue in a political campaign, especially when candidates have similar views on policy questions. In announcing his bid for the 2012 Republican nomination for president, for example, Mitt Romney reminded voters of his vast experience, both as a businessman and as a public servant. After leaving a “steady job” to start his own business, Romney explained, he grew that business from “ten employees to hundreds” and then became “deeply involved” helping other businesses to succeed, “from innovative startups to large companies going through tough times.” Subsequently, he left his own business to head the organizing committee for the 2002 Winter Olympics in Salt Lake City, helping to get that effort “back on track.” Finally, he went home to Massachusetts to serve as governor, digging that state out of a “\$3 billion budget hole” and balancing the budget each of his first four years in office. “All of these experiences,” Romney concluded—“starting and running businesses for 25 years, turning around the Olympics, governing a state”—helped “shape who I am and how I lead.”<sup>11</sup>

By emphasizing his extensive experience, of course, Romney hoped to contrast himself with President Barack Obama, who came into office in 2009 without much experience in either business or politics. Concerns about Obama’s youth and lack of experience—his *competence* to assume perhaps the most challenging job in the world—were common during the 2008 presidential campaign. They were the main reason many voters supported his rival in that year’s presidential election, Senator John McCain of Arizona.

## Open-Mindedness

A speaker’s ethos is also influenced by the impressions listeners have of his or her open-mindedness. Nobody is perfectly objective. But audiences value speakers who seem willing to enter into a dialogue, consider various points of view, and search for common ground. Of course, open-mindedness is not the same thing as empty-headedness; a speaker has the right to take sides in a controversy. Yet that does not mean you should distort, exaggerate, or otherwise misrepresent the facts to “win” a debate. Nor does it give you the right to dismiss the arguments, values, or feelings of those who disagree with you. To say that you are open-minded is not to say that you are wishy-washy. Rather, it means that you are willing to listen to others, treat their ideas fairly, and remain open to at least the possibility of changing your own mind.

In many situations, a speaker’s objectivity may be in doubt because of his or her position or reputation or because of the setting in which the speech takes place. In one of the most celebrated political speeches in history, for example, an African-American congresswoman from Texas, Barbara Jordan, rose above partisanship and displayed a broader vision of America’s promise at the 1976 Democratic National Convention. Jordan had become famous for denouncing President Richard Nixon during the

Watergate scandal, and some of her fellow Democrats might have expected a hard-hitting attack on the Republicans. Instead, Jordan talked about our common dreams and the need for all Americans to come together:

I could easily spend this time praising the accomplishments of this party and attacking the Republicans but I don't choose to do that.

I could list the many problems Americans have. I could list the problems which cause people to feel cynical, angry, frustrated;...I could recite these problems and then I could sit down and offer no solutions. But I don't choose to do that either.

The citizens of America expect more. They deserve and they want more than a recital of problems.

We are a people in a quandary about the present. We are a people in search of our future. We are a people in search of a national community.

We are a people trying to solve the problems of the present...but we are attempting on a larger scale to fulfill the promise of America. We are attempting to fulfill our national purpose; to create and sustain a society in which all of us are equal.<sup>12</sup>

Jordan was hardly an objective observer. But by rising above partisanship, she earned a positive ethos and delivered a speech that we still remember as one of the great keynote addresses in U.S. history.

## Dynamism

Finally, audiences look positively on speakers who are energetic and enthusiastic—in other words, speakers who are dynamic. Dynamism does *not* mean ranting and raving; it means achieving the right balance of enthusiasm and self-control. It means setting the right tone for the occasion. On the one hand, we want to avoid appearing as if we're just "going through the motions," talking in a colorless monotone or focusing more on our notes than our listeners. On the other hand, we do not want to scream at our audience, engage in distracting physical gyrations, or appear so intense that our audience thinks we're crazy! A dynamic speaker takes the middle ground, enthusiastically engaging the audience but not getting "in their face." Dynamic speakers talk *with* us rather than *at* us, communicating their personal enthusiasm but remaining "tuned in" to our reactions.

Perhaps the best way to summarize ethos is to think about it as a kind of filter: everything you say is filtered through the *perception* your audience has of your trustworthiness, competence, open-mindedness, and dynamism. What an audience thinks of a speaker—a speaker's ethos—may sometimes be determined by his or her past reputation. Still, every speech should be viewed as an opportunity to improve your ethos by demonstrating that *you* have the qualities we admire in a speaker.

## How Context Affects Ethos

Although ethos is always important, the characteristics that we admire in speakers may vary from situation to situation. If we attend a public briefing on a new sewage-treatment plant, we may not care whether the engineers explaining the system are dynamic or open-minded. We are more concerned with whether they can explain technical aspects of the plant clearly—whether they have the *competence* to answer our questions about how the plant would work. Conversely, we do not expect everybody at a town hall meeting to be an "expert" on every issue. Not everybody understands the tax laws or the best way to build a bridge. In that situation, we may be more concerned with the speaker's sincerity and open-mindedness, or we may be impressed by how passionately a speaker feels about some issue.

The context in which we speak thus determines what characteristics—or combination of characteristics—will affect our ethos. As speakers, we should reflect on which of

**Ethos**

Think of a well-known public figure. You can use a politician, a talk-show host, an athlete, or an actor, for example. How would you describe the ethos of this person, and what do you think has been the most important influence shaping his or her ethos?

the constituents of ethos may be most important to our audience in particular situations. As citizens, we should ask whether other speakers have *earned* the right to be trusted. Do they have the experience or knowledge necessary to speak convincingly about that issue?

In today's society, we are often tempted to judge the credibility of speakers by standards that have little to do with their background or training. Many advertisers, for example, pay celebrities to endorse their products. Perhaps it makes sense for a basketball player to endorse Nike shoes or a nutritional supplement. But even before he famously crashed his Cadillac Escalade following a domestic dispute, did we really believe golfer Tiger Woods when he claimed to drive a Buick? Is stock car driver Mark Martin really a good source of information about the prescription drug Viagra? Should we believe Jessica Simpson when she tells us that Proactiv cured her acne? Does anybody really believe that Paris Hilton eats at Hardee's? Perhaps these celebrities have at least *tried* some of the products they endorse. But it would be naïve to think that their endorsements have nothing to do with the millions of dollars the advertisers pay them.

Sometimes factors beyond our control influence our ethos. When Barbara Bush was invited to deliver a commencement address at Wellesley College in 1990, some students objected that she had done nothing to earn that honor—besides marrying the president of the United States! To her credit, Bush won over her audience by establishing her *own* ethos during the course of the speech. Reflecting on the challenges of balancing life as a mother with her role as First Lady, Bush concluded on a humorous note: "And who knows? Somewhere out in this audience may even be someone who will one day follow in my footsteps, and preside over the White House as the president's spouse. And I wish *him* well!"<sup>13</sup> Disarming her critics with humor, Mrs. Bush also communicated that she shared the ideals of her listeners at this progressive women's college.

Depending on the context, the same individual may have both a highly negative and a highly positive personal ethos. Indeed, many public figures who might be described as *controversial* or *polarizing* provoke widely differing audience responses, depending on the situation. On February 28, 2009, for example, talk show host Rush Limbaugh received an "immense ovation" when he delivered the keynote address at the Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) in Washington, DC. Given his frequent criticisms of "feminazis" and "environmental wackos," however, he likely would have been greeted differently at a conference of the National Organization for Women (NOW) or the Sierra Club. Similarly, the Reverend Jesse Jackson Sr., a long-time civil rights activist, received a warm reception when he addressed an NAACP fund-raising dinner in Detroit on May 3, 2009. Had he been speaking instead to the American Jewish Committee, the reception might have been cooler. Among many in that group, resentment still lingers over Jackson's 1984 reference to Jews as "Hymies" and New York City as "Hymietown."<sup>14</sup>

At this point in your life, you probably do not have to worry about how past indiscretions or media coverage of your life might affect your ethos. Each time you speak, however, people will form impressions of you, so it is important to keep the components of ethos in mind. Even in your speech class, your listeners will draw conclusions about your trustworthiness, competence, open-mindedness, and dynamism. It is never too early to begin building a positive ethos—a reputation that will help you succeed as a public speaker.

So what can you do to enhance your ethos? There is no simple answer because everything you do affects how listeners perceive you: the content of your speech, how you organize and deliver it, and how you come across in general. But here are some specific things you can do to strengthen your ethos.

**SHOW YOUR AUDIENCE THAT YOU SHARE THEIR EXPERIENCES AND CONCERNS** Showing your audience that you have something in common with them can strengthen your ethos. We feel a natural attraction to people we perceive to be like ourselves; we assume they face the same challenges and understand our values

and priorities. In a speech advocating tougher penalties for academic cheating, for example, one student recalled the pressures he felt from his parents and others to get into a top college. At one point, he even admitted that he had been tempted to cheat to get better grades. The students listening to the speech appreciated the fact not only that he had chosen a topic relevant to their lives but also that he shared their aspirations and understood the pressures they faced. He was honest enough to admit that he had been tempted to cheat, yet in the end he realized he would be cheating only himself.

**BOLSTER YOUR OWN ETHOS WITH THE ETHOS OF REPUTABLE EXPERTS** When you give speeches on highly complex or technical issues, you need information from experts. Your own lack of expertise on such topics need not undermine your ethos. When your remarks are supported by acknowledged experts, your audience can still have confidence in what you say. In Chapter 7, we explored the use of expert testimony in detail, but it is worth repeating here that you can bolster your own ethos by using testimony from highly reputable sources.

Suppose, for example, that you wish to speak about the effects of climate change on weather patterns or our forest ecosystems. You may have read many newspaper articles on the subject, and perhaps you have seen several reports on TV about climate change. But does that make you an expert? Of course not. You are a concerned citizen, and perhaps you know more about the topic than the average citizen. Yet if you hope to be persuasive, you still need testimony from reputable experts who have studied the problem, such as meteorologists and climatologists.

If you are genuinely open-minded, you might modify your own opinion as you read what leading experts have to say. But once you have settled on a firm opinion, the challenge is to communicate your conclusions, along with support for those conclusions from credible experts. Remember, a speech is not like a term paper, where you can just footnote your sources. Rather, you need to identify and establish the credibility of your expert sources *in the speech itself*. That means both naming your sources and saying something about their credentials. If you were to cite Paul Krugman in a speech on the economy, for example, you might identify him as an economist from Princeton University who won the 2008 Nobel Prize in Economics. By offering support from such renowned experts, you can improve your own ethos and make a more convincing argument.

## Highlighting Credibility

Credibility is an essential quality for any politician. Following are excerpts from former presidential candidate Mike Huckabee's speech to the Republican National Convention in September 2008. Notice how, even in defeat, Huckabee worked to build a positive ethos. By recalling the civil rights movement and expressing "great respect" for Barack Obama, he demonstrated his goodwill, open-mindedness, and devotion to the good of the country. In recalling his childhood, he reminded his audience of his humble background and displayed his sense of humor. At the same time, he countered negative images of Republicans as a party of the rich.

I grew up at a time and in a place where the civil rights movement was fought. I witnessed firsthand the shameful evil of racism. I saw how ignorance and prejudice caused people to do the unthinkable to people of color not so many years ago.

So I say with sincerity that I have great respect for Senator Obama's historic achievement to become his party's nominee—not because of his color, but with

indifference to it. Party or politics aside, we celebrate this milestone because it elevates our country . . .

I really tire of hearing how the Democrats care about the working guy as if all Republicans grew up with silk stockings and silver spoons. In my little hometown of Hope, Arkansas, the three sacred heroes were Jesus, Elvis, and FDR, not necessarily in that order.

My own father held down two jobs, barely affording the little rented house I grew up in. My dad worked hard, lifted heavy things, and got his hands dirty. The only soap we had at my house was Lava.

Heck, I was in college before I found out it wasn't supposed to hurt to take a shower. I'm not a Republican because I grew up rich, but because I didn't want to spend the rest of my life poor, waiting for the government to rescue me.

**SOURCE:** Reprinted by permission from Associated Press, Mike Huckabee's Speech. Copyright © 2008 by Associated Press.

**STRENGTHEN YOUR ETHOS WITH PERSONAL EXPERIENCES** You are more likely to be seen as trustworthy and competent when you have had some personal experiences related to your topic. A student aiming to help her audience understand the plight of Native Americans, for example, established her special qualifications to speak on this topic by recalling how she had spent three weeks on an Indian reservation, helping to repair homes and paint schools. Of course, you will not always have firsthand experience with the issues you speak about. But when you do, you can strengthen your ethos by talking about those experiences.

**STRIVE TO BE CLEAR AND INTERESTING** Listeners appreciate speakers who make their ideas understandable and who make an effort to keep the audience interested. Unfortunately, some speakers try to impress their audiences with “big words.” Other speakers make little effort to organize their speeches so they’re easy to follow. Still others may come across as not genuinely interested in their topic. We have all sat through dull and uninteresting speeches—speeches that hardly provide any “news” at all. Typically, it is not the topic itself that is the problem, but the failure of the speaker to consider ways to make the speech relevant and interesting to the audience.

You should try to gain the audience’s attention and interest from the outset of the speech—in your introduction. Doing so creates a positive first impression and improves your ethos throughout the speech. You can also maintain interest by citing examples that are familiar and relevant to the audience and by speaking directly *to* your listeners rather than staring down at your notes or reading from a manuscript. Sometimes little things make all the difference in whether your audience develops a positive view of your ethos. For example, some speakers hurt their ethos simply by talking too long. By showing respect for your audience’s comfort and expectations, you can enhance your ethos as a speaker.

**SHOW YOUR AUDIENCE THAT YOU HAVE CONSIDERED DIFFERENT POINTS OF VIEW** If you can show that you have considered other people’s opinions, you will demonstrate that you are both well informed and open-minded. For example, when the Indiana Department of Natural Resources proposed a two-day hunt to thin the deer population in Brown County State Park, both experts and ordinary citizens disagreed passionately over the idea. A student who favored the hunt began by showing that she initially shared some of the emotions felt by its opponents. She then explained how she changed her mind after carefully researching the topic and discovering all the problems caused by overpopulation, including disease and starvation in the deer herd. Recalling her interviews with both activists opposed to the hunt and DNR officials who favored it, she showed that she was open-minded and had considered both sides of the controversy.

**DEVELOP A DYNAMIC, AUDIENCE-CENTERED DELIVERY** How you deliver your speech can dramatically affect your ethos. One student with a well-prepared speech about crime and personal safety on campus failed to persuade her audience simply because listeners had trouble hearing her. Sitting in the back of the room and straining to hear what she said, some listeners became irritated and concluded that the speaker did not care about her topic or her audience. Likewise, speakers who use lots of vocalized pauses—*um*, *you know*, and *like*, for example—often irritate listeners and come across as inarticulate or even unintelligent. Finally, speakers who read rapidly through written manuscripts, without looking up or otherwise engaging listeners, may damage their own ethos.

Dynamic speakers remain in touch with their audiences. Speakers who seem bored or detached cannot expect their audiences to respond any differently, and they may even be perceived as less knowledgeable, competent, or sincere. As we suggested in Chapter 11, you can do many things to improve your presentational skills. Vocal variation, gestures, facial expressions, and eye contact can all have a significant effect



A dynamic delivery can contribute to your ethos as a sincere, passionate, and committed speaker.

on your ethos. Delivery may not be the only thing affecting your ethos, but it *can* make a difference.

Your audience's perceptions of your intelligence, character, and sincerity can affect the success of your speech. You can bolster your ethos by establishing common ground with your audience, by showing that you share common concerns, by citing reputable experts, and by mentioning personal experiences that qualify you to speak on your topic. Making an effort to be clear and interesting can also help your ethos, as can showing your audience that you have considered other points of view. Finally, you can enhance your ethos by delivering your speech effectively. By engaging your audience and delivering your speech with enthusiasm, you can show your listeners that you care about them and your topic.

## Appealing To Audience Emotions

### 14.4 Discuss the techniques and ethics of appealing to an audience's emotions.

**Preview.** *If you hope to persuade your audience, you need to engage their emotions. You can engage your audience's emotions by using strong, affective language; appealing to shared social values; providing specific, vivid details; helping listeners visualize what you are talking about; and comparing the unfamiliar to the familiar. Emotional appeals, however, can be deceptive and manipulative and should never substitute for reasoned arguments.*

Listeners who have little or no emotional involvement in a speech are unlikely to be persuaded. Appealing to an audience's emotions is fundamental to motivating

## Focus on Civic Engagement

### Former Presidents Bury the Political Hatchet

Former presidents George H. W. Bush and Bill Clinton were bitter political rivals. During the 1992 presidential campaign, Bush attacked the challenger Clinton as a “tax-and-spend liberal” and, in a moment of uncharacteristic passion, even called him a “bozo.” For his part, Clinton portrayed Bush as an agent of “privileged private interests” who had betrayed his promise of a “kindler, gentler” America. In his speech accepting the Democratic nomination in 1992, Clinton accused Bush of talking a “good game” but having “no game plan to rebuild America.”<sup>15</sup>

Imagine people’s surprise, then, when the two former presidents joined hands to lead the U.S. relief effort following the devastating tsunami in the Indian Ocean in 2004. Traveling to the region and raising millions of dollars to help rebuild homes and lives ravaged by the disaster, they used their ethos as former presidents and political rivals to make an important point: that even in an era of deep partisan divisions, people can work together for the common good. Following Hurricane Katrina, the two again joined forces to raise more than \$120 million for rebuilding colleges and churches devastated by the storm. The “Odd Couple,” as Barbara Bush characterized them, not

only did a lot of good but also became close personal friends. Perhaps most importantly, they took advantage of their return to the public spotlight—and their unique ethos as former rivals—to call for more civility and cooperation in American politics. Following the shooting of Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords and nineteen other people in January 2011, Bush and Clinton again teamed up to serve as honorary chairmen of a new National Institute for Civil Discourse at the University of Arizona. “Politics doesn’t have to be uncivil and nasty,” Clinton said when asked about his relationship with Bush. “Where we can find common ground and do something for the future of the country and for the future of our children and grandchildren, I think we ought to do it.”

**SOURCES:** Michael Duffy, “Bill Clinton and George H. W. Bush,” *Time*, May 8, 2006, [www.time.com/time/specials/packages/article/0,28804,1975813\\_1975847\\_1976609,00.html](http://www.time.com/time/specials/packages/article/0,28804,1975813_1975847_1976609,00.html) (accessed January 16, 2015); ABC News, “People of the Year: Bill Clinton and George H. W. Bush,” *World News Tonight*, December 27, 2005, <http://abcnews.go.com/WNT/PersonOfWeek/story?id=1446477#.TOuhgHm-y50> (accessed January 16, 2015); and JoAnne Allen, “Former Presidents Bush, Clinton Team Up for Civility,” *Reuters*, February 21, 2011, <http://blogs.reuters.com/talesfromthetrail/2011/02/21/former-presidents-bush-clinton-team-up-for-civility> (accessed January 16, 2015).

them to act. You may even need to engage their emotions to get them to listen in the first place. If people are not emotionally involved in a topic, they are not likely to be persuaded.

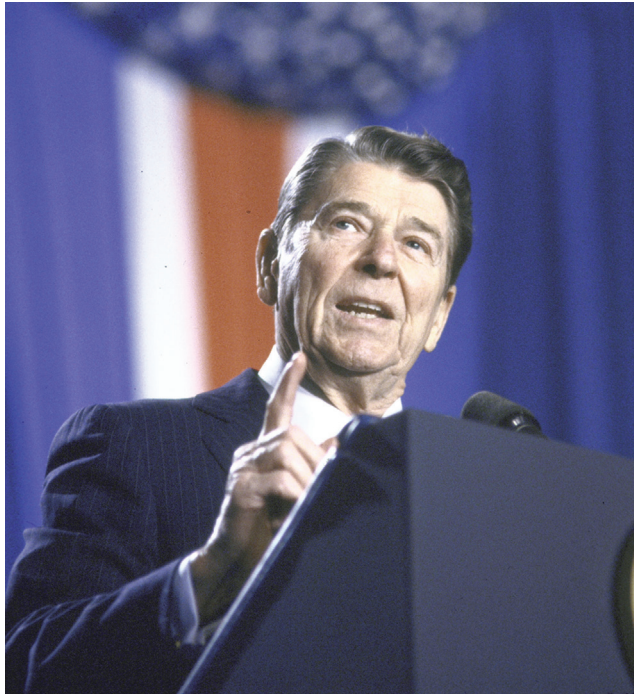
Fear, pride, anger, reverence, hatred, compassion, and love—all are strong emotions and can be powerful motivators. Successful speakers know that listeners can be motivated by appeals to such emotions. Notice how former president Ronald Reagan, a president remembered as the “Great Communicator,” used emotional appeals to build support for dramatic increases in military spending. Instead of reviewing the “long list of numbers” in his defense budget, Reagan tapped into some of his audience’s most basic emotions: their fear of nuclear war, their sense of “duty” as citizens, and their concern for protecting their children and their “free way of life”:

The subject I want to discuss with you, peace and national security, is both timely and important.... This subject involves the most basic duty that any president and any people share, the duty to protect and strengthen the peace.

At the beginning of this year, I submitted to the Congress a defense budget which reflects my best judgment of the best understanding of the experts and specialists who advise me about what we and our allies must do to protect our people in the years ahead. That budget is much more than a long list of numbers, for behind all the numbers lies America’s ability to prevent the greatest of human tragedies and preserve our free way of life in a sometimes dangerous world.<sup>16</sup>

Appeals to your audience’s emotions should never substitute for reasoned arguments backed by the best available evidence. Yet neither can we ignore the role of emotions in human behavior, especially if we hope to motivate our audience to act. A speech that fails to engage the audience’s emotions is dull, boring, and lifeless—and, in the end, probably ineffective. The characteristics of speech that engage your audience emotionally include affective language, shared values, vivid detail, visualization, and familiar references.





Former president Ronald Reagan, the Great Communicator, used emotional appeals to build support for dramatic increases in military spending.

## Affective Language

**Affective language** is strong language that plays on emotions or feelings. Consider the emotional impact of this series of statements:

“I see things differently from Bob.”

“I think Bob’s statement is not quite accurate.”

“What Bob is saying seems misleading.”

“Bob is a liar.”

To call Bob “a liar” is to use strong, affective language. As a persuader, you must choose your language carefully, taking into account both the ideas you hope to convey and the emotional connotations of the words you choose.

Eugene Debs, a four-time Socialist candidate for president of the United States, passionately opposed American involvement in World War I. Yet in the pro-war climate of the time, Congress passed laws that limited the right to criticize the government’s war policies. Along with other antiwar speakers, Debs was arrested, tried, and convicted under one of these laws, the Sedition Act of 1917. At his sentencing, however, Debs refused to tone down his rhetoric. Instead, he spoke out against social injustice in emotionally powerful language:

Your Honor, years ago I recognized my kinship with all living beings, and I made up my mind that I was not one bit better than the meanest on earth. I said then, and I say now, that while there is a lower class, I am in it, while there is a criminal element, I am of it, and while there is a soul in prison, I am not free...

I am thinking this morning of the men in the mills and the factories; of the men in the mines and on the railroads. I am thinking of the women who for a paltry wage are compelled to work out their barren lives; of the little children who in this system are robbed of their childhood...and forced into the industrial dungeons, there to feed the monster machines while they themselves are being starved and stunted, body and soul. I see them dwarfed and diseased and their

### **affective language**

Strong, provocative language that stirs up an audience’s emotions.

little lives broken and blasted because . . . money is still so much more important than the flesh and blood of childhood . . .

Your Honor, I ask no mercy and I plead for no immunity. . . . I never so clearly comprehended as now the great struggle between the powers of greed and exploitation on one hand and upon the other the rising hosts of industrial freedom and social justice.

I can see the dawn of a better day for humanity. The people are awakening. In due time they will and must come to their own.<sup>17</sup>

By today's standards, Debs's language may seem excessive, even "over the top." Nowadays we do not often hear talk about children "robbed" of their childhood, "dwarfed and diseased," their "little lives broken and blasted." But nearly 70 years later, César Chavez used equally emotional language to describe the plight of migrant farmworkers in America. In a speech before the Commonwealth Club of California in 1984, Chavez began by describing what motivated him to fight for the rights of migrant workers:

Today, thousands of farmworkers live under savage conditions, beneath trees and amid garbage and human excrement near tomato fields in San Diego County. . . . Vicious rats gnaw at them as they sleep. They walk miles to buy food at inflated prices and they carry in water from irrigation ditches.

Child labor is still common in many farm areas. As much as 30 percent of Northern California's garlic harvesters are underaged children. . . . Some 800,000 underaged children work with their families harvesting crops across America. Babies born to migrant workers suffer 25 percent higher infant mortality rates than the rest of the population. Malnutrition among migrant workers' children is 10 times higher than the national rate. Farmworkers' average life expectancy is still 49 years, compared to 73 years for the average American. All my life, I have been driven by one dream, one goal, one vision: to overthrow a farm labor system in this nation that treats farmworkers as if they were not important human beings. Farmworkers are not agricultural implements; they are not beasts of burden to be used and discarded.<sup>18</sup>

Chavez, of course, had statistics to back up his argument, but it was his affective language—his references to "savage conditions," living amid "garbage and human excrement," sleeping among "vicious rats," and so on—that gave his speech its emotional power.

## Shared Values

Listeners are more likely to be emotionally engaged when their own values are involved. One way to involve your listeners emotionally is to identify values that you share with them and show how your ideas or proposals relate to those values.

After Barack Obama's election in November 2008, the new president used a series of weekly "transition" addresses to rally the country behind his agenda, reminding Americans of their shared values and urging them to work together. In his first address just a week after the election, he observed that "in America we can compete vigorously in elections and challenge each other's ideas, yet come together in service of a common purpose once the voting is done." America faced "the most serious challenges of our lifetime," he reminded his listeners, but he expressed confidence that those challenges could be overcome if we could just "put aside partisanship and work together as one nation." A week later, he again suggested that we would "rise or fall as one nation, as one people" and argued that the difficult challenges of our time would "require not just new policies but a new spirit of service and sacrifice, where each of us resolves to pitch in and work harder and look after not only ourselves, but each other." Finally, in his third address, he put the burden of success or failure squarely on

the people, calling on every citizen to recapture that spirit of service and devotion to the common good that historically had made America great:

The survival of the American Dream for over two centuries is not only a testament to its enduring power, but to the great effort, sacrifice, and courage of the American people. It has thrived because in our darkest hours we have risen above the smallness of our divisions to forge a path toward a new and brighter day. We've acted boldly, bravely, and above all, together. That is the chance our new beginning now offers us, and that is the challenge we must rise to in the days to come. It is time to act.<sup>19</sup>

Not everybody embraced Obama's vision of a "new beginning," of course. But many did respond to his call to service, especially young people. On a website titled *United We Serve*, Americans answered the president's call for people to "participate in our nation's recovery and renewal" by volunteering for various service initiatives, including disaster relief, anti-hunger programs, and the Martin Luther King Jr. Day of Service.<sup>20</sup> The appeals on the site tapped into our emotions because they invoked shared values: sympathy for the less fortunate, devotion to the common good, and our desire to help make the world a better place.

## Vivid Detail

Using vivid detail can help your audience relate to your topic emotionally. Listeners respond more positively to concrete examples and stories than they do to abstractions. Charities that raise money to help sick children, for example, often choose a "poster child" who represents thousands of other children afflicted with disease. The "poster child" gives potential donors somebody they can relate to emotionally—a real person whose suffering they can help relieve.

Persuasive speakers engage audiences' feelings by reinforcing their ideas with vivid details. Before the Civil War, for example, the great abolitionist Frederick Douglass painted a vivid portrait of slavery that enhanced the emotional power of his most famous speech, "What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July?" Highlighting the irony of slavery in a nation founded on liberty and freedom, Douglass argued that slavery violated America's most sacred ideals. At the same time, however, he made a powerful emotional appeal by vividly describing the scene of a slavemaster, "armed with pistol, whip and bowie-knife," driving a group of a hundred men, women, and children "from the Potomac to the slave market at New Orleans." As the "sad procession" moved "wearily along," the slavemaster barked out orders with "savage yells" and "blood-chilling oaths." Describing the sights and sounds of the march, Douglass pictured in vivid detail an "old man, with locks thinned and gray," and a young mother, "shoulders...bare to the scorching sun, her briny tears falling on the brow of the babe in her arms." He also urged his listeners to "see" a girl of thirteen, "weeping, yes, weeping, as she thinks of the mother from whom she has been torn!" Finally, the "heat and sorrow" overcame the slaves and some faltered, resulting in the sound of "a quick snap, like the discharge of a rifle," followed by "a scream" that penetrates to "the center of your soul!" That "crack," Douglass explained, "was the sound of the slave-whip; the scream you heard, was from the woman you saw with the babe." Douglass concluded with still more vivid images of the auction itself, where the men were "examined like horses" and the women "rudely and brutally exposed to the shocking gaze of...slave-buyers." With his vivid words, Douglass helped his listeners "see" the brutality and "hear" the "deep, sad sobs" of the slaves being sold.<sup>21</sup>

## Visualization

In addition to vivid details, there are other techniques you might use to help your listeners "see" what you're talking about. **Visualization** can be achieved through the use of pictures or other visual aids and sometimes even with statistics or examples. By

### visualization

Using language that creates "word pictures" and helps your audience "see" what you are talking about.

helping your listeners visualize what you are talking about in your speech, you can stir their emotions, get them thinking more deeply about your topic, and clarify information that otherwise may be vague or unclear.

The most obvious way to help your audience visualize a problem is, of course, to show them a picture. Perhaps you have heard the old saying “Pictures don’t lie.” In an age of digitally altered photos, of course, pictures *can* lie. But used responsibly, they can communicate information that may be difficult to communicate in words. Pictures can also have a strong emotional impact on your audience. “A picture is worth a thousand words,” goes another old saying, and that is especially true for pictures that surprise, shock, scare, or otherwise engage our emotions.

Sometimes pictures can provide powerful, even irrefutable evidence for a speaker’s claims. During the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962, for example, the American ambassador to the United Nations, Adlai Stevenson, confronted the Russian ambassador with high-altitude reconnaissance photos that dramatically disproved Russia’s denial that nuclear missiles had been stationed in Cuba. On other occasions, photos may be used simply to increase the emotional impact of an argument. Mothers Against Drunk Driving, for example, personalize their statistics with photos of young victims of alcohol-related crashes. Similarly, supporters of a strong defense still invoke images of those two hijacked planes crashing into the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001. By rekindling the feelings of horror and anger many Americans felt on that day, they hope to build support for a more aggressive war against terrorism.

Visualization is not just something you do by showing pictures to your audience. By painting “word pictures,” you can use language to help your audience visualize a problem, “see” an abstract idea, or grasp an otherwise incomprehensible statistic. During the building of the Panama Canal 100 years ago, for example, journalists helped their audiences back home visualize the magnitude of the project with mind-boggling comparisons. One wrote of how the dirt removed from the canal route would build 63 pyramids the size of the Great Pyramid of Egypt. Others compared the canal to digging a tunnel 14 feet in diameter “through the very heart of the earth” or building a longer version of the Great Wall of China—“from San Francisco to New



Blow-ups of high-altitude reconnaissance photos provided dramatic support for U.S. Ambassador Adlai Stevenson’s speech to the United Nations, in which he accused the Soviet Union of stationing offensive nuclear missiles in Cuba.


York.” One account even reported that the soil excavated for the canal would fill a train long enough to encircle the earth four times—a train that could be pulled only by a string of locomotives stretching from “New York to Honolulu.”<sup>22</sup>

Visualization also can be used to contrast a troubling present with a brighter future. In a famous speech at the 1992 Democratic National Convention, for example, former New York governor Mario Cuomo asked his audience to visualize a parade like those we stage to honor military heroes. This time, however, the parade would celebrate safe communities, affordable housing, adequate health care, and economic security. Like parades celebrating the safe return of our soldiers, this parade would be spirited and jubilant. The people would sing “proud songs, happy songs,” and the parade would include blue-collar workers “who have a real stake in their company’s success,” parents glad to be living in safe neighborhoods “where children can be children,” and young people who have the opportunity to attend college and someday own their own homes. At the end of the parade, there would be fireworks and still more celebration, with the citizens giving thanks for the nation’s strong economy and for our success at “outproducing and outselling our overseas competitors.”<sup>23</sup> Regrettably, we rarely see this sort of parade, Cuomo concluded. We often see parades honoring soldiers returning from war, but we seldom celebrate our victories in education, housing, health care, or the economy.

## Familiar References

Speakers often relate new ideas, plans, or proposals to familiar things, not so much to prove their value but to help listeners *feel* more comfortable with something new. By this means, complicated and even controversial ideas can be made to seem more familiar and “everyday”—and therefore more acceptable. Before America entered World War II, for example, Franklin Delano Roosevelt defended his controversial plan to supply ships and other war materials to the British—his “lend-lease” plan—by comparing it to how you might help a neighbor whose house was on fire. Logically, perhaps, the two situations were not really comparable. Yet FDR’s illustration helped many Americans *feel* that his lend-lease plan was a good idea—the “neighborly” thing to do:

Well, let me give you an illustration: Suppose my neighbor’s home catches fire, and I have got a length of garden hose four or five hundred feet away; but, by Heaven, if he can take my garden hose and connect it up with his hydrant, I may help him to put out his fire. Now what do I do? I don’t say to him before the operation, “Neighbor, my garden hose cost me \$15; you have got to pay me \$15 for it.” ... I don’t want \$15—I want my garden hose back after the fire is over. All right. If it goes through the fire all right, intact, without any damage to it, he gives it back to me and thanks me very much for the use of it. But suppose it gets smashed up—holes in it—during the fire. ... I say to him, “I was glad to lend you that hose; I see I can’t use it anymore, it’s all smashed up.” He says, “How many feet of it were there?” I tell him, “There were 150 feet of it.” He says, “All right, I will replace it.” Now, if I get a nice garden hose back, I am in pretty good shape. In other words, if you lend certain munitions and get the munitions back at the end of the war, if they are intact—haven’t been hurt—you are all right; if they have been damaged or deteriorated or lost completely, ... you have them replaced by the fellow that you have lent them to.<sup>24</sup>

 By comparing a complicated governmental policy to the familiar act of helping the folks next door, FDR made his lend-lease policy *feel* like the neighborly thing to do.

## The Ethics of Emotional Appeals

In advertising, we are constantly bombarded with emotional appeals. Yogurt commercials feature an elderly man and his even older mother, implying that if we eat yogurt, we, too, can live to a ripe old age. Ads for athletic shoes exploit the dreams

and ambitions of young people, suggesting that if they wear the same shoes as their heroes, they, too, can be superstars. Political ads show candidates sympathizing with the sick or the elderly, or they try to frighten us into thinking that the other candidate may take away our Social Security or blow up the world. Advertisers know that successful marketing often depends on an audience's emotional reactions. Thus, they persuade us by associating their products with personal success, physical or economic security, or love and "family values."

### Appeals to Emotion

What, in your opinion, determines whether appeals to emotion are ethical? Are there certain types of emotional appeals—or appeals to certain emotions, such as fear or hatred—that you think are always unethical? Does a speaker's purpose influence your assessment of whether his or her emotional appeals are ethical?

### Public Controversy

Define *public controversy* and identify two or three public controversies that you think are important today. Do you believe that public debate over those controversies has helped clarify the issues involved or the options for resolving those controversies?

Emotional appeals, however, can be deceptive and manipulative. More than 2,000 years ago, the rhetorician Aristotle warned that emotional appeals could warp an audience's judgment, producing hasty or ill-considered decisions.<sup>25</sup> When feelings such as fear, anger, love, rage, and guilt are stirred, the results can be powerful and unpredictable. Ethical public speakers respect the power of emotions. They never use emotional appeals to distract, disorient, or manipulate their listeners.

In speaking persuasively, you should never short-circuit the reasoning process or provoke an emotional overreaction on the part of your listeners. Vivid stories about brutal crimes, the suffering of victims of natural disaster, or the horrors of war may sometimes be appropriate, depending on the situation and the audience. However, we all have heard speakers who go too far. In striving to stir audience emotions, some speakers use crude or tasteless language and images, justifying such tactics as necessary to get people "fired up." Apart from the possibility that such tactics may backfire, the ethical speaker avoids overwhelming listeners with emotions so strong that they can hardly think. Appeals to emotion should supplement and complement well-reasoned arguments, not undermine reasoned deliberation or provoke hasty, violent actions.

When in doubt, ask yourself this question: Underneath the emotional appeal, do I have a sound argument—a substructure of evidence and reasoning—that can withstand critical scrutiny? You do not want your audience members to respond unthinkingly. Rather, you want to appeal to their minds while recognizing that emotions play an important role in human behavior.

## Summary

### The Anatomy of Public Controversy

#### 14.1 Define *public controversy* and discuss what it means to *deliberate in good faith*.

- Persuasion is rooted in public controversy, or disagreements over matters of political or social significance.
- As citizens in a democracy, we have an obligation to deliberate "in good faith," respecting our fellow citizens and backing up our opinions with good reasons and evidence.

### Questions of Fact, Value, and Policy

#### 14.2 Distinguish among the three different types of persuasive issues: fact, value, and policy.

- Public controversies typically revolve around questions of fact, value, or policy.
  - Questions of fact involve controversies over existence, scope, or causality.

- Questions of value revolve around how ideas and actions should be evaluated or judged.
- Questions of policy involve choices among future courses of action.

### Ethical Proof In Persuasive Speaking

#### 14.3 Define *ethos* and discuss what contributes to strong credibility.

- Ethical proof, or *ethos*, refers to the audience's perceptions of the credibility of the speaker and his or her sources.
  - The constituents of ethos are trustworthiness, competence, open-mindedness, and dynamism.
  - Your ethos will be influenced by the context or situation in which you speak.
  - You can enhance your ethos by showing your audience that you share their concerns, citing reputable sources, relating personal experiences, striving to be clear, considering different points of view, and delivering your speech effectively.

## Appealing to Audience Emotions

### 14.4 Discuss the techniques and ethics of appealing to an audience's emotions.

- Emotional appeals can be powerful motivators.
  - You can engage the emotions of your audience by using affective language, identifying shared

values, using vivid detail, using visualization, or comparing the unfamiliar to the familiar.

- Emotional appeals should never be used to deceive or manipulate or to *replace* well-reasoned arguments.

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## Key Terms

Public controversies

Deliberating “in good faith”

Burden of proof

Question of fact

Question of value

Question of policy

Ethos

Affective language

Visualization

## Overmatter text

### Notes

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