

PROLOGUE

Athens, late fourth century B.C. A city state where everything –from a trial to the election of a government position to promotions in the army– was decided by popular vote, after listening to the speeches of the various speakers. It was the right context for the birth of a new profession: those who helped public speeches get votes. Their business proposal could be summarized as: **“Tell me which cause you want to defend, and I’ll help you win.”**

These “mercenaries of the word” offered their rhetorical services at the best price. A good speech starter, a sequence that works, a story that moves, evocative poetry, a rhyme that makes the message more memorable... and even a funny nickname to ridicule the adversary.

Before them, Aristotle from Stagira stood up to defend another model of what today we would call leadership. In the Areopagus, surrounded by his fellow citizens, he raised his voice to proclaim: “Neither arguments nor emotions are decisive: what really counts is the credibility of the speaker. Therefore, not every cause can be defended, but only an idea in which the speaker is a legitimate defender.”

The Stagirite labeled these paid rhetoricians the derogatory adjective “sophists,” experts in using fallacious arguments (“sophisms”) to persuade others. For Aristotle, “Persuasion is the quality that allows the speaker, through his credibility, his emotional connection and his arguments and proofs, to convince his audience of a point of view or a behavior, because it’s beneficial for both of them.”

Twenty-five centuries have passed since then, but nothing has changed. Today, as it was then, there is a proliferation of those who teach public speaking as if it were a technique without soul. As if persuasion and manipulation were almost the same thing.

In the book you hold in your hands, we defend the opposite: persuasive skills are an important part of good leadership, characterized by a mentality of service to those who listen to you. A good leader does not “rule”, imposing his vision using the strength from his job title, money or fear, but persuades (the “soft power”) so that people follow his recommendations freely. A skill that has its point of strength in ethics, which is the root of credibility.

Surely, in these pages you will find structures that work, useful tips on how to create a good message, and recommendations on verbal and body language. These tips come from the accumulated experience of the authors, all expert trainers of managers. We recommend them because they work, but they are not magic recipes. They work because they are rooted in an anthropological vision of the human being. Aristotle was certainly a great rhetorician, but above all, he was a great philosopher.

In fact, the authors of every chapter –top level professionals– each with their own style, follow a method they have developed over time, with their own likes and preferences. But in this essential work we have agreed to appeal to the common principles of rhetoric as developed by Aristotle in an organic way.

We hope that it will be helpful to any reader, but we recognize we have set it up with participants in the executive programs of IESE in mind, the management school of the University of Navarra, where we teach Communication Skills courses. It is a book made by many hands, by those who have written them and by others, as there was not enough room for everyone. It is the collective work of the team that has been training professionals for many years to become better leaders by making better decisions, which always have an ingredient of communication.

This is not meant to be an academic publication (there are great books on this, some of them signed by members of the team) but to offer a short summary of the essentials, to be used to prepare the exercises in our courses and to return to when in professional life we have to make a proposal to the management committee, a few words in a difficult negotiation, a lecture on a tricky challenge, or simply a nice story to celebrate a professional achievement or to say goodbye to a loved person.

We are sure that these words of advice will help you, whether you are already doing it very well or are still far from excellence. The most important thing is that you never give up or become satisfied. Remember that public speaking is not a theoretical matter. It is like riding a bicycle: there is always some theory, but above all there is personal effort, a determination to improve with every speech, and practice, practice, practice.

So, if I may give you some advice, follow the recommendations below, but don't forget the main thing. Some of the magnificent dag-

gers made in Toledo were engraved with the legend: *Don't trust me if you lack heart*. Good communication comes from within, it is not a disguise but a way of being and leading.



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After graduating in Law from the University of Santiago de Compostela and a PhD in Philosophy from the University of Navarra, he has worked as a journalist (founder and CEO of the News Agency ROME Reports TV), director of corporate communications and professor at several Business and

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After teaching at IESE for many years, in courses related to corporate communication, crisis management, media relations, public affairs and reputation, ESG risk management and public speaking, in the MBA, MIM, executive education and tailor-made programs, Yago de la Cierva is now the President of Universidad Villanueva Foundation.