Rhetorical Analysis of Anderson’s *Confessions of a Radical Industrialist*

Most businesses today simply strive to increase their profits by any means, rarely considering the environment. But what sets business leader Ray Anderson apart from others is his peculiar (but inspirational) goal of having a company that is completely sustainable to the environment-without cutting profits. In his book, *Confessions of a Radical Industrialist*, Anderson explains his journey of transforming his business to eventually become completely sustainable. With this book, his goal is to convince and inspire other companies to seek out methods of production that will not have such harmful affects on environment as most industries have today. He claims that it is in both business and society’s best interest to become completely sustainable in the future. I will be analyzing some of the rhetorical strategies Anderson uses to try and persuade other business leaders to follow in his footsteps. In this paper, I will identify how Anderson uses the “3 pillars of persuasion-ethos, pathos, logos” defined in Julia T. Wood’s book *Communication in Our Lives* to build a strong persuasive argument.

Let me start with defining ethos more in depth, and pointing out ways of enhancing it. Ethos refers to a process in which the speaker builds a perception of good character and credibility by the audience (Wood, 447). Ways that a speaker can enhance his/her ethos include creating a perception that he/she-has integrity, is trustworthy, has a goodwill towards the audience, knows the topic well, and demonstrates a dynamic commitment to the topic (Wood, 447). When analyzing Anderson’s argument, I saw how he uses all of the above attributions to enhance his ethos. Now I will go on to show how he meets each of these points.

Integrity can be seen simply through his actions throughout both his lifetime and his years of leading Interface. He has led his life and his company in a direction that is completely consistent with his morals and beliefs in sustainability. He explains how he wants to do good by the environment with considerations of people in the future, rather than have his actions be dictated by greed like typical business leaders these days. Nobody in government or industry has told him to make this bold move towards sustainability; he made the decision on his own based on ethical values.

Another way to enhance ethos is to exercise goodwill towards the audience-business owners and people in the community. In Chapter 10 of the book, he shows this goodwill by telling about the programs Interface has launched to try and influence businesses towards sustainability. Specifically, a program called InterfaceRAISE is a consulting arm that can enlighten other businesses on how to become more sustainable, while still making a profit. In the Chapter 10, Anderson provides a quote from the CEO of Wal Mart’s Sam’s Club speaking about his experience with InterfaceRAISE reading,

“Visiting Interface and seeing the creativity to establish more sustainable practices made it undeniable that the rest of us can do the same. We don’t have to spend time wondering if we can do something. Instead, we can move on to figure out how” (156).

By including this quote, the author cleverly enhanced his ethos/credibility by showing praise from other world-renowned corporations. Anderson clarifies his goodwill towards other companies and society as a whole by the creation of a consulting arm meant to help businesses increase profits and reduce their ecological footprint.

In the beginning of the book, Anderson further heightens his credibility by stating the achievements of both himself as an entrepreneur and Interface as a company. In the first chapter, he explains how he came of 17 years of working under another company before he took the plunge of starting his own. Now, he says the company has grown “from scratch into the world leader in carpet tiles (modular carpet) with annual sales of more than a billion dollars” (2). That is about 40 years of solid industrial knowledge, which directly relates to credibility. In addition to that, he is the only one who has lead a top company through an environmental transformation so drastic, so he is clearly among the most credible individuals to speak on the topic. In the view of others, Anderson is seen as an expert consultant on the topic. In support of this, he was chosen to serve on the President’s Council on Sustainable Development, and served as its co-chair (xii).

It is beyond doubt that Anderson speaks with dynamism about the issue, further increasing his ethos. With quotes like this one from Chapter 16, Anderson describes his new view of reality as “accepting the fragile finiteness of the earth; adopting a long view and putting humans in their proper relationship with nature;” he captures the reader and puts them into his mind (267). By speaking on how his thinking has changed, and showing enthusiasm in his new ideas, it causes the audience to be enthused as well.

Now I will move on to recognize a second strategy of argument used by Anderson; pathos. Pathos involves techniques used by the speaker to arouse feelings among listeners. Throughout the book, Anderson uses certain techniques to enhance his pathos, which include: personalizing the issue, appealing to the audience’s needs/values, and bringing material alive (Wood, 450).

Anderson provides a detailed example in Chapter 2, which personalizes the issue for the audience by putting them in the same situation he faced. He builds up to this moment by describing how proud he was of himself in taking a huge risk and building such a successful company from nothing. In telling the story, he lets the audience feel the pride he felt up to 1994, when a powerful question was introduced that changed his thinking entirely. The question, sent to him by a sales associate, read, “Some customers want to know what Interface is doing for the environment. How should we answer?” (9). Anderson exercises an effective strategy of pathos in this instance by promoting feelings of inspiration among the audience through his story of accomplishment, and then letting them feel the shame and/or confusion he felt on the day this question was sent to him.

A second method found in Anderson’s argument to enhance his pathos is appealing to the needs of his audience (Wood, 450). In this example, his intended audience is business leaders. Significant needs/values of conventional business leaders today and tomorrow is always going to be profit, reputation, and efficiency. The book provides many steps for businesses to take in order to meet these values from a business point-of-view, and the author uses detailed examples of how shifting to environmental innovations can help meet the conventional values of today’s businesses. A good example of Anderson using this strategy is in Chapter 4 when he is talking about ‘climbing mount sustainability’. In this chapter, Anderson appeals to needs and values of businesses by saying that “capitalist, enlightened self-interest” can be a driving force for companies to move towards sustainability (38). And he goes on to say that the payoff of sustainability will be “nothing short of survival-while earning a solid, honest, ethical profit” (39). These statements represent an effective strategy of argument using pathos by appealing to the needs of business-profit, reputation- and saying that it’s in their own self interest to take a more environmental path towards achieving these needs.

Finally, I will touch on the third method that Anderson uses to enhance pathos-bringing material alive (Wood, 450). He does this by telling stories and using language that paints verbal pictures. In the start of Chapter 14, Anderson writes,

“I explained how Paul Hawken’s book, *The Ecology of Commerce*, indicted me as a plunderer of the earth. I was a captain of industry, a success by anybody’s measure. And by my very success I was also an instrument of destruction, an unwitting participant in driving humanity straight off a cliff” (225).

This section is a textbook example of how to choose language that will impact the audience, and paint a vivid verbal picture. From the view of the audience, *plundering* the earth sounds worse than *harming* it, and *driving humanity off a cliff* sounds more convincing than *hurting* humanity. These words are clear-cut examples of how the author enhances the pathos aspect of the argument with the instrument of language.

Last but not least, I will address the logos aspect of the author’s persuasive argument. Logos deals with how the author uses logical thought and reasoning, along with evidence, to persuade the audience (Wood, 450). Typically, two types of reasoning are used: inductive and deductive reasoning (Wood, 450). I will show how Anderson uses evidence to enforce his reasoning-which ultimately enforces his argument. Anderson mostly uses the technique of deductive reasoning, introducing global/general claims and backing them using specific examples and/or evidence.

In Chapter 14, Anderson uses deductive reasoning, first by stating a generally accepted claim that “our universities have been very good for years at turning out professionals equipped with skills appropriate to the first industrial revolution, but not the new one” (227). In other words, Anderson blames universities for teaching students old ways of business practice rather than considering the environmental issues that businesses will face in the future. The essence of the author’s argument is that current business practices can be attributed to what universities teach. He suggests that if universities would teach more environmental business practices, it will greatly help shift business to be more sustainable in the future. Using deductive reasoning, Anderson continues to support this general claim by providing a more specific example found in the transformation of his own alma mater, Georgia Tech. Anderson explains how in 1995, the university revised its mission statement to be more committed to teaching sustainability in its business and technological practices. Anderson goes on to say that in years since, “Georgia Tech is now among the world’s best in the areas of green policy, green practices, and integrated academic curricula”, followed by a list of the institute’s environmental achievements (231). With the previous quotations, the author effectively used deductive reasoning to state a general claim that universities can help solve the environmental issue of sustainability in the future, and supported this claim by showing a success story, making the claim more convincing to the audience.

In conclusion, the author effectively used and considered the argumentative techniques of ethos, pathos and logos when writing this book. In the beginnings of the book, Anderson does a good job establishing his ethos by showing his integrity and goodwill towards the audience, along with his knowledge and enthusiasm about the issue. His credibility is based off his 40 years of being a leader and participant of industrial business, and his story of coming from humble beginnings to being mentioned in several business magazines. He exercised pathos by appealing to the needs of other business leaders that may be reading, proposing steps they can take that are in their own self interest of seeking more profits, while doing less harm to the environment in the process. When appealing to readers who may not be business leaders, he uses language to bring the issue alive and relate it to all of humanity. Towards the end of the book, Anderson uses logos to convince the audience that his argument is based off sound reasoning and evidence, suggesting that they begin to act now towards a more sustainable future. These three strategies helped to make the book more persuasive, and convince readers to take action.

Works Cited

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