

Exceptionally Human

**Successful Communication in a
Distracted World**

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Chapter 1

Exceptionally Human

“Try not to think of anything as a problem. Start with a forgiving relationship to laziness and impatience and cultivate a sense of humor about them both. And then trick them.”

—Anne Bogart, A Director Prepares

It was almost preordained that I would wind up having a career in Communication. Having grown up in the Land of Oz, or what is otherwise known as Los Angeles, in a music industry family, I witnessed first-hand how communication generated and created fantastic realities. A pulling of levers here, some smoke blown there, and *voilà*, a star was born...or not. More often than not it was the ability to spin, or better yet, to persuade, that allowed one person to get the recording contract and the other to keep his or her day job. Sure, talent played a significant role, but it was how that talent was packaged and displayed that made the final difference.

I had a front-row seat to these spin-persuasion sessions. I had the opportunity to experience the wizards in action, watch people become spellbound,

and see what stuck and what fell by the wayside. I saw how credibility was lost and gained, how powerful emotions were elicited, and how at times perverse logic was swallowed up like little chocolate treats. Little did I know I was privy to the power of communication and the ability to master it, creating the realities in which others live. And it wasn't until I left Los Angeles for college, and started studying communication, and was introduced to Aristotle, that I started to understand that what I had been witnessing, has been taking place for millennia, and that it is *exceptionally human*.

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use the words *exceptionally human* to highlight those aspects of our behavior that rise

above and beyond the typical, usual, or standard. Some of us are exceptional in mathematics, or the sciences, or in athletics, and still others in the performing arts, or in music, or the visual arts. Some of us are exceptional spouses, parents, sisters, brothers, and friends. When I say that what I witnessed growing up was *exceptionally human*, I am referring specifically to a person's ability to master a complex set of skills so as to assure that whatever it is they are communicating is paid attention to, and perhaps most importantly, listened to. *Exceptionally human* communicators apply time-honored

techniques in what appears to be effortless, yet is done in a highly strategic, manner. Exceptionally human communicators recognize and understand what behaviors and words to employ, under what circumstances, and actually have the ability to pull it off. It may not be every time they communicate, but when the need arises, they are at the ready. And soon enough, that will be you as well.

Aristotle was an exceptional human being. Among his many great achievements are his rhetorical proofs, or what I think of as the three elements of exceptional human communication. According to Aristotle, there is *ethos*, the credibility you have and the trust you earn from people. Next, there is *pathos*, the emotions you generate in others. And finally there is *logos*, how reasonable people find your message based on the ideas, facts, and arguments you present. Trust, feeling, and reason are the three qualities Aristotle says we need to persuade people to take action, and the men and women who master these qualities enjoy extraordinary success.

It is a tribute to the strength of Aristotle's insights that more than 2300 years after his death, *ethos* (trust), *pathos* (feeling), and *logos* (reason) are still the foundation of exceptionally human communication and the good results we hope to achieve from our interactions.

I think a lot about Aristotle's three elements. I think about them as a husband and the father of