

Hartford Courant

Looking for Helpful Rhetoric in Times of Crisis

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New York Governor Andrew Cuomo showed us again this week how to be a leader — and what rhetorical skills and virtues that requires. Using a very personal and powerful story about his brother Chris Cuomo (CNN Anchor) who just tested positive for COVID-19, the governor tells a heartwarming story that is sure to resonate — one with which anyone can identify. He documents how to challenge people calmly but firmly to take the pandemic seriously and behave in a disciplined manner.

Cuomo portrayed his humanity, grasp of the facts and understanding of what must be done to get us through this difficult moment in history. The rhetorical balance demonstrated in the Governor's message — of personal narrative with the needed response to the crisis — was superb, providing an archetype of successful messaging in times of crisis.

Imagine if we had a President of the United States who, instead of promoting himself, could lead in this manner. As a scholar who has studied and taught political communication for over 40 years, Cuomo's example proves that effective rhetoric, which includes a careful blending of logos pathos and ethos, is an essential tool for the nation's ability to survive COVID-19.

*Richard Cherwitz
Austin, Texas*