

## Winning Edge #4 – How to Persuade with Numbers

This is Trevor Bragdon with Commonwealth Partners' *Winning Edge*: Tips to help conservatives persuade and win.



We've all had the experience where you come back from a meeting or even church, and someone asks you, "How was it?" and you say, "It was great they talked about ..." and then your voice trails off and you try to remember what was discussed. You sort of feel dumb that you say something was "great" but then can't say why.

The reason you struggle to articulate it is that to be persuaded, two things need to happen. You need to feel an emotional response but also have some logic and facts to back it up.

On the other extreme, we've also heard presentations with so many facts and numbers that our eyes glaze over.

To persuade with numbers, your goal is not just to give a bunch of facts. Instead, your goal should be to present the numbers to your audience so they are memorable and have an emotional response.

How do you do it?

There are three key ways to persuade with numbers.

### 1. Have a Translation Sentence

Think of numbers and statistics like a foreign language to your audience. If you casually dropped in French words or a short phrase in French to your presentation, you'd be expected to provide a translation so your audience isn't confused. The same is true with your numbers. Every time you have a number in your presentation, provide a sentence or two of context either before or after the number.

- Example: You want people to understand the size of the state budget deficit at \$3 billion. Is that a lot? Is that a little? A billion dollars is a lot, but how is the audience supposed to know?
- With a translation sentence, you could say, "Right now, the state budget has a proposed deficit of \$3 billion. That's about 7%. Or to think of it another way, it's like spending \$107 at the store and trying to pay with only \$100. The store wouldn't accept it, and neither should the taxpayers."

## 2. Round and Make Concrete

The second thing you can do to make numbers more persuasive is to **round and make concrete**. You don't have to be precise when talking about data unless it's critical or technical info important to your audience. Most of the time, it's better to be memorable and directionally accurate than precise and forgettable.

- For example, when discussing unemployment, there are about 1.72 jobs for every unemployed individual. That's a precise number but forgettable. Instead, say, "For every 10 unemployed people in the state, there are 17 open jobs."

## 3. Make it Human Scale

The third way to persuade with numbers is to **Make it Human Scale**. Many times, large numbers are abstract and hard to remember. Instead, think about what your data represents and how to make it to the scale of a single human.

- For example, a proposed energy policy is projected to increase electric bills by 30%. That's a lot, but people don't think in percentages. Instead, you could say, "If this proposal passes, your \$150 electric bill will jump to almost \$200."

Your audience thinks of bills on a monthly basis, so present the data in a way that makes it memorable to them.

To learn more about making numbers more persuasive, check out the book *Making Numbers Count* by Chip Heath and Karla Starr.

The next time you have numbers or statistics you need to present, remember the three ways to persuade with numbers .

1. Have a translation sentence
2. Round and make concrete
3. Make the numbers human scale

Try these, and give your data the winning edge.