

## Winning Edge #10 – 3 People Who Persuade You

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



One evening, the screenwriter and producer Sherwood Schwartz got a call from his agent. “Tomorrow is *the* meeting,” the agent said.

Sherwood Schwartz hung up the phone. It was 7:00 pm, and he needed to write the opening for a new show he had pitched to CBS executives. The CBS CEO had been skeptical of the show and couldn’t figure out how it would work. Schwartz insisted he’d take care of it in the show’s opening minute—but now it was time to put up or shut up.

Schwartz pulled out a legal pad and started writing, rewriting, and revising into the night.

He arrived early the following day to have 18 copies typed for the executives and walked into the meeting. It was his turn to pitch, and Schwartz handed out the copies and waited.

The CEO looked at the sheet and said, “Songs were not meant to be passed around. Songs were meant to be sung.”

Schwartz didn’t sing, but wanted the deal closed. He cleared his throat and started, “*Just sit right back and you’ll hear a tale, a tale of a fateful trip...*”

When he finished, there was silence. The other executives waited to hear the boss speak first. Finally, the CEO spoke, “Well, I think you can fool around with the middle lyrics a little,” and he approved the show.<sup>1</sup>

The show, as you probably guessed, was Gilligan’s Island. It became a hit with 99 episodes and has been in worldwide syndication.

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<sup>1</sup> As told by Sherwood Schwartz when interviewed by Del Reisman  
<https://youtu.be/dmCDJN0p3BM?t=793>

Years later, Schwartz was asked about the song and why it started every episode. He said it was there “Because the confused do not laugh.”<sup>2</sup> He knew the only way the show made sense with seven random people shipwrecked on an island was if the audience understood the context. The song did just that and framed the start of each episode.

Framing matters when you give a presentation, speech, or pitch. Especially at the beginning because just like the confused don’t laugh, the confused are not persuaded.

One way to frame a persuasive speech is to use a concept I learned from the copywriter Will Green. He said, “There are three people who persuade you—the Expert, the Convert, or the Friend.”<sup>3</sup>

When planning your speech, think about what persona you want. Do you want to present as The Expert, The Convert, or The Friend?

**The Expert** - This frame is about persuading an audience with an appeal to logic. The speaker quotes facts and statistics or shares expertise. The foundation of the presentation is the speaker’s expert status. The tone and pacing with an expert frame are often more factual and less passionate.

For example, I give a talk on motivating people to vote called The Psychology of Voting. If I opened in the expert frame, I’d lead by talking about how I’d run voting experiments in 20 states, studied behavioral science at the London School of Economics, and managed or worked on 70+ campaigns.

The next frame is the Convert.

**The Convert** - The convert takes a different approach. The foundation for the Convert framing is the personal story or journey. It follows the “I used to think this, and here’s why I changed” pattern. It’s a personal journey. Just like a religious conversion, this framing is more dramatic

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<sup>2</sup> Hanlon, Patrick. Primal Branding: Create Belief Systems that Attract Communities (p. 11). Free Press. Kindle Edition.

<sup>3</sup> From a presentation I attended by the copywriter Will Green in October 2018.

and intimate. The goal is to have the audience see themselves in the story and realize they could change.

Your tone and pacing in a Convert frame are much more passionate, with more vocal variety when you speak.

If I were giving that same talk from the Convert frame, I would start by telling the story of losing a special election. We'd tried everything, and it didn't work. After the defeat, I tried to figure out what had gone wrong and stumbled across a YouTube video. It was a speech at Stanford on how the left used behavioral psychology to get people to vote. I watched all 55 minutes and sat there blown away. How didn't we know about this?

The final frame is the Friend.

**The Friend** - The friend approach is a more causal foundation built on established trust with the audience. The speaker appeals to their past history and trustworthiness. It is more of a relaxed discussion one would have over a cup of coffee. The speaker still shares persuasive stories and facts, but the foundation is built on personal trust.

I would frame the Friend approach like this: *Do you remember the first election you voted in? For me, it was the 2002 gubernatorial election, and I remember exactly who I voted for. I bet you remember the first time you voted. It meant something to you. It was important. But for many people, voting is just something they do—sometimes, when it's easy or when the stars align just right. It is hard for us to get our heads around that.*

The next time you have a speech or presentation, remember Gilligan's Island theme song and think about how you will frame your talk. Will it be **the Expert** focused on facts and logic, **the Convert** where you persuade with a story and personal journey, or the casual framing of **the Friend**?