

Winning Edge #32 – Building trust at the door: A three-step approach



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

You've just finished mowing the lawn on a hot Saturday afternoon. After grabbing a cold drink and a snack, you sink into your favorite chair, ready to relax and catch up on your favorite show. You're finally starting to relax, maybe even dozing off, when the doorbell rings. With a sigh, you heave yourself up and trudge to the door, hoping it's just an Amazon delivery.

But when you swing open the door, you're greeted by an unfamiliar face with a stack of flyers. It's a candidate running for office, standing on your doorstep. What's going through your mind? If you're like most voters, it's a mix of surprise, mild annoyance, and maybe curiosity.

Now, let's switch places. You're the candidate standing at the door. How do you use this brief encounter to convince the voter you're worth listening to - and voting for?

This episode is all about what to say when going door to door and how to build trust with voters.

One way to think about it is that it's like climbing three steps to a voter's front door. Each step represents a level of trust you need to build, and the higher you climb, the more likely you are to gain their support.

Step 1: Are You Normal?

The first question in a voter's mind is, "Are you normal?" or maybe the more polite, "Is this person like me?" Your goal is to establish common ground quickly and show you're relatable.

- Prepare a one- or two-sentence introduction that signals you're "normal" or have something in common with the voter.
- Example: "Hi, I'm John Smith. I'm a dad with three kids and running to be your state representative."
- Or: "Hello, I'm Jane Doe. I've lived in this neighborhood for 15 years and own Doe's Diner downtown. I'm running for..."

Think about how you can signal that you're part of the community or share something in common with the voters. Are you from the same town? Do you have similar family situations? Have you faced the same challenges they have? Quickly establishing this connection can make voters more receptive to hearing your message.

Step 2: Can You Do the Job?

Once voters see you as "normal," their next logical question is, "Can this person actually do the job they're running for?" Voters are surprisingly sophisticated in their assessment. They understand that the stakes are different for local offices versus statewide. They may be fine supporting a young person for the city council but wouldn't consider it for statewide office.

To show you can do the job, ask an open-ended question that interrupts the voter's thought pattern and engages them. For example:

- "If you had the power to change one thing in our state, what would it be?"
- Or, "Imagine you're governor for a day - what's the first thing you'd change?"

These questions make people pause and think. While most won't have an immediate answer, they'll start talking about the issues at the top of their minds or bothering them.

- Listen closely to their response. This is your opportunity to understand their thinking and why specific issues are their priority.
- Be prepared to respond thoughtfully. You can discuss the issue they've raised, explain your stance, or outline what you plan to do about it. For instance, you might say, "That's a great point. I think the key thing we need to address is [add in specifics...] When I'm elected, I plan to..."

Also, have your answer ready if they turn the question back on you. This allows you to showcase a specific plan and the principles guiding your decision-making.

Step 3: Will You Help Me If I Need You?

The final question in voters' minds is about your intentions. They want to know if they can count on you when specific concerns arise. While this trust takes time to build, you can start by:

- Following up on concerns they've expressed in previous interactions.
- Explain how you're working to improve issues they care about.

- If you disagree, share how your view has evolved: “When I started, I thought the same thing. But here’s why I changed my thinking…”
- Briefly share a story of how you’ve helped constituents in the past, showing that you are responsive to voters’ needs.

Remember, building trust is a process. Each interaction is an opportunity to climb another step. Focusing on these three questions – Are you normal? Can you do the job? Will you help me? – you can turn brief doorstep encounters into lasting voter support.

As you prepare for your next door-to-door session, think about how you’ll address each step. Craft your introduction, prepare thoughtful questions, and demonstrate your commitment to voters’ concerns. Practice your responses so they feel natural and sincere.

With this three-step approach, you’ll be ready to build the trust necessary to win on election day. Now, knock on those doors and climb those steps to voter trust.