

Winning Edge #36 – Helping Undecided Voters Not Be Wrong



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

Eleven days before the 1952 election, Dwight Eisenhower needed to make a strong closing argument for his campaign and win over undecided voters. America was tired of the Korean War, which had lasted for two long years with no end in sight.

The challenge was how to navigate two major groups of voters—those who had initially supported the war and didn't want to feel like it was a waste, and people who were frustrated with its current progress.

Eisenhower decided to give a televised speech in Detroit that would do three things:

1. Respect and honor the sacrifice already made by soldiers in Korea, focusing on the moral duty of why they fought.
2. Show what's changed and give voters a plan for the war's future, including a commitment to go to Korea and assess the situation firsthand.
3. Provide a path to peace free from blame, focused on resolution and moving forward so both war supporters and critics could agree.

The speech became known as the "I will go to Korea" speech. It was highly successful, and Eisenhower received 55 percent of the vote. Just four weeks after winning the election, Eisenhower went to Korea and assessed the situation on the ground. Six months later, the war ended with an armistice.

Eisenhower's strategy in 1952 provides a timeless template for addressing undecided voters. Let's break down how you can apply this approach in your campaign.

In the last days of any campaign, it all comes down to voter turnout and persuading those final undecided voters. At the local level, there's often five to fifteen percent of the electorate who remain undecided up until the last moment.

But what really sways an undecided voter? While we may never know all the factors, one thing is certain: voters want to feel they're making the "right" decision. This desire for being right is so strong that many voters would rather leave a ballot blank than risk making a wrong choice.

Your Winning Strategy: Help Voters Feel Right

So, how do you help undecided voters feel confident in their choice? The key is to provide a narrative that validates their past decisions while offering a compelling reason to support you now. Here's how to do it, following Eisenhower's example:

1. **Respect the Thinking**—Acknowledge the appeal of your opponent (or party) in the past
2. **Highlight What's Changed**—Express disappointment in how they've governed
3. **Show How to be Right Again**—Position yourself as the right choice moving forward

Crafting Your Message

Here's an example of how to frame your message for independent voters who previously supported your opponent:

"When John Smith ran two years ago, he promised to be an independent voice for our community. Many of us hoped he'd live up to that promise in the capitol. Unfortunately, he's voted with his party 95% of the time. He talks about being independent at home but can't resist party pressure in office.

"I'm running because we need someone who puts our town first, regardless of party politics. Someone who's focused on solving our local problems and is the same person at the corner store and in the Capitol. I'd be honored to have your vote and represent you."

Or you could have an even shorter version:

"John Smith campaigned as a moderate but hasn't lived up to that promise. He votes with the liberals XX% of the time. We need someone who will put our town first, not their political party."

The Bottom Line

Just as Eisenhower won over undecided voters by respecting past sacrifices, acknowledging changes, and offering a clear path forward, you can apply this same strategy in your campaign.

This approach respects voters' intelligence and matches their desire to make the right choice, positioning you for success at the ballot box.

Your goal is to make voters feel their past decisions were correct while presenting a compelling case for change. By validating their previous choices and outlining a clear vision for the future, you can win the support of undecided voters in the final days of your campaign.