

Winning Edge #42 – One Statistic, One Story, One Solution

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



In January 1855, England was in the middle of the Crimean War. For the troops on the ground, there was little fighting that month—about 100 soldiers died in combat, a tragic number although much smaller than casualties from the earlier heavy fighting. But still another 2,800 soldiers lost their lives that same month. These men didn't die on the battlefield—they died in military hospitals from disease and unsanitary conditions.

One woman refused to accept this. Florence Nightingale, a nurse working near the front lines, saw the horrific conditions that killed more soldiers than the war itself. When she returned to England, she made it her mission to fix the system. She needed to persuade Parliament to act.

But it wasn't easy for a woman in the 1850s trying to influence lawmakers, and Nightingale knew she needed a persuasive approach. She focused on three elements:

- One statistic: 2,800 preventable deaths in a single month
- One story: January's devastating hospital death toll
- One solution: Vote for specific hospital reforms

It took time, but her approach worked. Parliament passed the reforms, and Nightingale went on to transform modern nursing, eventually advising leaders like Abraham Lincoln on hospital design during the Civil War.

Nightingale instinctively understood that when persuading others to change, simplicity and storytelling work better than a tsunami of statistics. Here's why:

1. **One Statistic:** People need a clear, memorable number. When we shift our perspective on something, it often comes from realizing the seriousness of the problem.
2. **One Story:** Our brains are wired to remember stories. We might forget names and faces, but we remember stories for years. When combined with a striking statistic, stories become even more powerful. A story allows the listener to get new information so you can update their thinking.

3. **One Solution:** Have a clear, specific action to take. Just as Nightingale didn't present a laundry list of reforms but focused on one crucial vote, you need to focus on one achievable action.

Putting It into Practice

When preparing your next speech or presentation:

1. Identify your single most compelling statistic
2. Find one powerful story that illustrates its emotional impact
3. Focus on one specific solution you want your audience to take.

Test your message by asking: Is your statistic clear and memorable? Does your story stick? Is your proposed solution specific and actionable?

Bottom Line

In an age of endless distraction, Nightingale's approach is more relevant than ever. Remember: one statistic, one story, one solution. Just as Florence Nightingale used one month's devastating numbers to transform military hospitals and save countless lives, you can use this simple formula to change minds.