

Winning Edge #48 – The Hand Framework for Persuasive Speeches



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

"You're not very good at public speaking. It's probably holding back your career."

Not what I expected to hear while waiting in line at a hotel buffet after moderating a panel. But the person wasn't wrong. I had excuses: early flight, grad school, a pregnant wife, two kids at home. But none of that mattered. I'd given a mediocre performance.

So I asked the person who told me this, "What do you recommend I do?"

He said, "Practice more."

Great. Thanks. The big secret? Practice.

But I had practiced—and it still didn't work. That's when I realized the real problem: I didn't know what I was practicing.

That's the challenge with most speaking advice. It's either too vague to be useful—or too narrow to apply broadly. You don't need more reps. You need a simple structure you can use anywhere—whether you're giving a training, a pitch, or a policy talk.

That's where the Hand Framework comes in. It's visual. It's flexible. And it works.

The Hand Framework for Persuasive Talks

Each part of your hand maps to a key part of your speech:

- **Thumb—The Goal:** What do you want your audience to do and why aren't they doing it already? The thumb touches every finger—just like your goal should shape every part of your talk.
- **Index Finger—The Hook:** Start strong. Use a story, a question, or a surprising stat to grab attention.

- **Middle Finger—The Hold:** Deliver the core content. If you lose them here... well, the middle finger says it all.
- **Ring Finger—The Hurdle:** What's holding them back? Acknowledge it. Help them move past it.
- **Pinky—The Handoff:** Make the next step clear. Don't inspire and walk away. Show them what to do.

The Hook: Don't Waste the Opening

The first few seconds are your most valuable—and most people waste them.

- *"Thanks for having me..."*
- *"Before I begin..."*
- *"Let me get my slides up..."*

Instead, start with a story, stat, or a question. The goal is to make them care, fast.

Three Story Hooks:

- **Personal Story**—Build trust and connection. Show you've been in the trenches.
- **Problem Story**—Set up the core challenge your talk will solve.
- **Curiosity Story**—Open a loop they want closed. Make them think, what happens next?

You can also lead with:

- **One Statistic**—Keep it simple and surprising. Make the number the main character.
- **One Question**—A well-framed focus question can stop people in their tracks and make them rethink their assumptions.

The Hold: Delivering the Message

Once you've hooked them, you have to hold them. Structure matters so use 3, 2, or 1.

- **Three Steps**—Great for teaching a process or strategy.
- **Two Points**—Perfect when your talk is built on contrast or reframing.
- **One Big Idea**—The most powerful structure when you need to cut through noise.

Example:

"There are three levers that drive fundraising growth. Let me walk you through each one..."

Structure earns attention. It tells your audience: There's a plan here. Stay with me.

The Hurdle: Why Haven't They Acted Already?

Here's the question every persuasive talk must answer:

- "If this is such a good idea, why aren't we already doing it?"

Most people aren't lazy. They're stuck. Your job is to show them why—and how to move forward.

There are three common hurdles:

- **Skill Set** (Foggy Path): They don't know what to do. Clear the fog. Give the first step.
- **Mindset** (Shaky Bridge): They're afraid to act. Reframe the risk. Help them feel safe.
- **Tool Set** (No Bridge): They lack the tools. Give them what they need—a case study, checklist, or walkthrough.

The Hurdle is where you show empathy. You get what's hard—and you're here to help.

The Handoff: Make the Next Step Obvious

Don't end with "Let us know if you're interested." That's not a close—it's a shrug.

Instead:

- Show them the impact of saying yes.
- Script the next move.
- Make it easy to act.

Give them something tangible to walk away with—an idea, a phrase, a handout. Something that sticks.

Putting It Into Practice

Next time you write a speech or high-stakes presentation:

1. Start with your thumb—What's the goal?
2. Use your index finger—Hook attention early.
3. Deliver the message—Use 3 steps, 2 contrasts, or 1 big idea.

4. Clear the hurdle—Skill, mindset, or tool—what's stopping them?
5. Make the handoff—Show them the next step.

The Hand Framework is simple, memorable, and built for action. Use it. Practice it. And next time you speak, don't just inform—move people to act.