

Winning Edge #61 – Spiking Your Audience’s Attention

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



How do you speak without losing people?

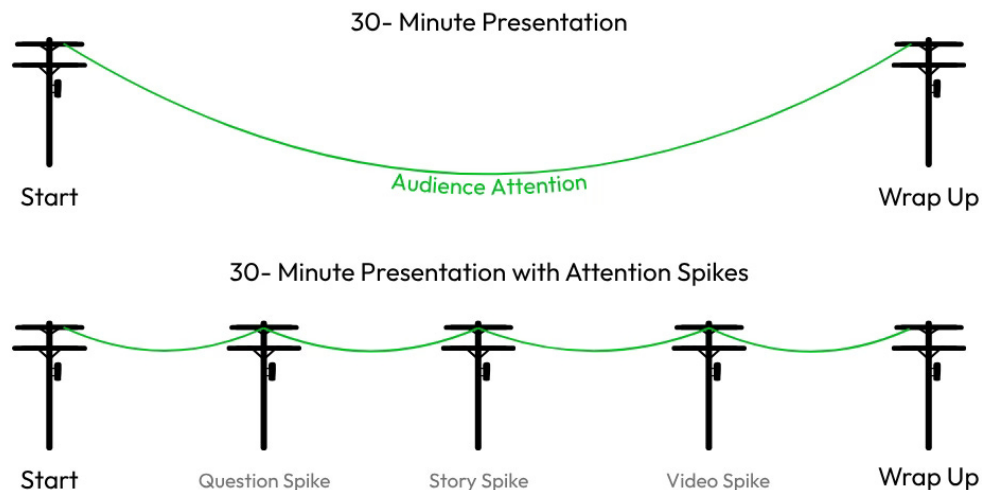
We have all had this experience. You’re speaking and notice a few people glance at their phones. Then a few more. You start to feel the energy in the room dip.

The problem is after the first 90 seconds of any speech, focus starts to drift, even when the topic’s good and you’re dynamic.

So how do you keep your audience’s attention?

You use attention spikes.

This idea comes from speaking trainer Kevan Kjar. He describes audience attention like a power line. Go too long between interesting moments, and the line sags lower and lower.



The solution is simple: install a few extra “power poles” along the way to keep attention high.

With each spike you’re helping the audience start re-engaging and thinking again, instead of passively half-listening.

Here are five ways to use spikes to keep your audience engaged.

Tell a Story

Reinforce a key point with a quick story, ideally 30 to 90 seconds long.

Use one sentence to set the context, then three to five sentences to tell the story.

A short story resets attention and makes your point more memorable.

You should also keep one or two story spikes in your back pocket in case something goes wrong.

Steve Jobs used to keep a story ready in case there were any technical issues during his keynotes. While the team fixed the problem, he'd tell a story to hold the audience's attention and keep the momentum going.

Ask a Question

Use a question that makes your audience think: "How does this apply to me?"

Even a quick prompt can reset attention.

For example, if you were giving a presentation on this spikes concept, you could say: *"Think about your next presentation. Take 15 seconds and pick one of these spikes you could use."*

If you have time, listen to a few responses or make the moment interactive. Or you can predict what people thought. *"I bet a lot of you thought..."*

Play a Short Video

A 30-75 second video can reset the room's energy, especially when it's funny or unexpected.

Clips from The Office or comedians like Nate Bargatze work because almost everyone recognizes them.

A quick video gives the room a laugh and resets focus. Plus, you can use it to have a clean transition into your next point.

Create a Mystery

Show only part of a picture or graph and have the audience guess what comes next or why it happened.

If you're using a chart, zoom in on just one section. Then have people guess what caused the change or dip.

This small mystery of not knowing what comes next pulls people in and re-engages their attention.

Run a Quick Poll

Try a question like: "On a scale of 1 to 10, how comfortable are you with [asking for money / making a presentation / some aspect of your topic]?"

Then ask groups to raise their hands based on their score ranges. "Okay, quick show of hands, how many of you answered 7+?" It wakes people up and lets them see themselves in the room.

The key with attention spikes is not to overdo them. One every 6 to 10 minutes is enough to keep your audience from slipping into passive listening.

A good rule of thumb: For every 10 minutes of your talk, include one spike. In a 30-minute talk, plan for three intentional moments to re-engage attention.

Bottom line: If you don't plan to keep their attention, don't be surprised when you lose it. Before your next presentation, map out your timeline and decide where to place your spikes.