

Winning Edge #67 – Work Out Your Stump Speech

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



In 1998, after ending *Seinfeld*, Jerry Seinfeld decided to start over. He threw out all his old jokes and started to create a new stand-up routine from scratch. You can see it all in the documentary *Comedian*. Even with Seinfeld's years of experience, what's fascinating is how often his jokes bomb.

At one point, he forgets the punchline to a joke. He's fumbling through his notes. The awkwardness spills over into the crowd, and an audience member heckles, "Is this your first gig?"

But Seinfeld keeps working out the comedy act in what he calls the "smelly gym" of comedy clubs. Eventually, he creates a great stand-up act that showcases all fresh material.

So, if one of the best comedians has to work out his material in smelly comedy clubs, what makes us think we can jump up on stage, and get it right on the first try? We can't.

The good news is you have your own gyms to work out your stump speech.

Over the next few months, you will be working out your material at events ranging from low-stakes to high-stakes: Lincoln Day dinners, Rotary clubs, small talk at community events, luncheons, and so on. Each time you speak, you are testing out material to find what lands—and what doesn't.

Back in [Winning Edge #48](#), we talked about the hand approach to a speech:

- Hook: Open with a story, a statistic, or a question.
- Hold: Keep attention with 3 things, 2 points or contrast, or 1 big idea.
- Hurdle: Address the objection people won't say out loud.
- Handoff: End with a clear call to action.

Just like Seinfeld with a joke, you'll have an idea of what works, but you won't know what really works until you try it live. The audience is the only real judge.

This winter is the time to find out which stories land and which ones make listeners so bored they reach for their phones to check Instagram or X.

Use the next two months to practice.

Hook: Test your opening.

- A story about why you're running.
- A story that reveals your character.
- A question that makes people think.
- A surprising statistic.

Hold: Test your structure.

- **Three** things you'll do if elected.
- **Two** reasons you're running.
- **One** most important thing the state or your district needs.

Hurdle: Test how you overcome objections.

- Answer that big question or concern that the audience has about you.
- Say out loud what's already in their head.

Handoff: Test your close.

- What's the action you want them to take?
- What closing strategy compels them to sign up, give, or volunteer?

For the next two months, treat every speaking opportunity as an experiment. Keep the material that lands and revise (or delete) the stuff that doesn't. Each repetition will make you better, so by spring you'll have a great stump speech.