

## Winning Edge #69 – Breaking a Wave

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



In 1950, two French hydraulic engineers tried to do the impossible: stop the sea. Specifically, they were trying to stop giant waves from destroying breakwaters and coves.

In the past, the solution was to build higher, bigger breakwaters. But in post-war France, there weren't enough resources to build bigger and higher. They had to find another way. Then they had an idea: what if you didn't need to stop the wave but instead just break it up?

Through trial and error, they created what is now known as the tetrapod, a four-armed concrete structure that resembled a large child's toy jacks. The beauty of the design was that it didn't matter what angle the wave hit from or how hard it hit—the tetrapod would break up the force and disperse it in all directions. When the tetrapods were placed together, they would not move.

After its success in several storms, the tetrapod was rapidly adopted worldwide to protect coastlines from storms and massive waves.

In a campaign, there is always a storm. It may be a wave of voters that dampens turnout, a flood of negative ads that threatens your base, a deluge of outside money that forces you to raise more, or an interview packed with tough questions meant to sink your campaign. Sometimes it's simply the constant fight to hold voters' attention in a short-attention-span world.

Often in these situations, candidates act like the old seawalls. They double down on whichever area they're most comfortable with—doors, fundraising, or events—and just do more of it to withstand the storm.

Instead, prepare for the inevitable storm by building your own tetrapod of skills. Focus on developing four arms to break up the wave.

**Arm 1:** A stump speech that clearly says why you are running.

**Arm 2:** The ability to answer tough questions thrown at you about the big issues in your state and district.

**Arm 3:** A strong fundraising system with consistent weekly fundraising calls.

**Arm 4:** Short, memorable stories that make voters remember you and want to vote for you.

Think about where your campaign is right now. This week, which arm of your tetrapod will you work on? Will you...

- Polish your stump speech so you can deliver it conversationally with no notes needed?
- Practice answering the tough questions and clarify how you talk about your positions on difficult issues?
- Push off the fear and start making ten fundraising calls a week?
- Develop a few stories and your gas station pitch so voters remember you after a brief interaction?

You don't have to improve all four at once, but just focus on one this week.

Because when the blue wave of money, mail, and attacks hits, your preparation is what will help break it apart.

So, go ahead and work on that one arm of your tetrapod.