

Effective Personal Advocacy: Perspectives from Some Experts in the Field

Carole Lawler, Legislative Assistant, Everett, Gaskins, Hancock & Stevens

1. **Be yourself.** These are regular people and you do not need to put on airs.
2. **Be polite.** Say "Please" and "Thank you". Do NOT treat Legislators as your paid public servant, and do NOT make demands. Yes, they are there to serve, but they deserve to be treated with respect and common courtesy. (This I learned working in Sen. Garrou's office. You would be astonished at how rude people could be in their communications with our office.)
3. **Be specific.** It is OK to ask someone to support issues of Importance to women, but have two or three specifics.
4. **It is perfectly permissible to say "I don't know,"** if you are asked a question by a legislator. Be sure to offer to find out what they need to know and follow-up as quickly as possible.

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The name of the game is: COMMUNICATION

Rule 1: Know your issue

- Learn as much about your issue as you can
- Make sure you know who is on the other side, if anyone
- Make sure you know the other side's arguments
- Anticipate what questions might be asked and develop good answers

Rule 2: Always tell the truth

- The only thing you have is your credibility – do not lose it
- Don't overstate your case
- If you don't know the answer, don't make it up – tell them you will get back with the information
- If by some chance you have given out misinformation, the minute you find out go back and tell those you have relayed the information

Rule 3: Don't wait until you need something

- Meet the candidates and newly elected legislators and try to find out how they view issues
- Everyone responds better to someone they know than someone they just met
- People don't like to only be recognized when something is needed

Rule 4: Determine the best way to communicate

- Meeting with people in person is always the most effective way to convey information and present your side persuasively
- However this is not always possible the following tools can also be used: phone call, letter, e-mail, or fax
- It depends on personal preferences as to which method is the most effective. Try to find out. Just ask.

Rule 5: Presenting yourself

- Treat this like you are going to a business meeting – dress appropriately
- Do not be rude
- Do not do things that some would find offensive

Rule 6: Be timely

- Know where your issue is in the process. If you are two weeks behind that does not look good.
- If you committed to providing additional information do it in a timely manner.

Rule 7: Say thank you

Rule 8: Collaborate

- Look for allies – form coalitions with other groups with similar interests on the issue
- Encourage your colleagues and allies to send the same general messages to the same legislators and others who respect them

Rule 9: Understand the politics

- There are always other issues in the mix besides yours. Your issue may get caught in “the game.”
- For whatever reason, a legislator may not be able to support you on this issue. Do not make the person a permanent enemy.
- There will always be another day and a new issue.

Rule 10: Rarely is an issue black and white

- Make sure you know what your compromise room is on your issue
- Legislators like for everyone to get something

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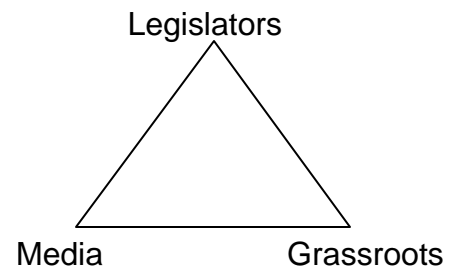
Paula A. Wolf, Lobbyist, Planned Parenthood

Lobbying is About Relationships

Get to know your representatives:

- Invite them to your workplace
- Communicate praise and criticism
- Stay informed
- Call/Write/E-Mail

Advocacy Triangle



Pat Yancey, Director of Public Education, Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention Coalition of North Carolina, Intergovernmental Relations Consultant / Lobbyist for the Friends of Residents in Long Term Care

LEGISLATIVE ADVOCACY: WHAT TO DO

1. Be Informed — Be thoroughly prepared

- Most legislators respond to the power of informed opinion, particularly when the opinion is shared by a significant number of his/her constituents.
- Study the issue and its history – pros and cons
- Know your legislator's views and voting record on the issue or similar issues, if possible.
- Know how it will affect the legislator's district if such information is possible to discern.
- Know the status of your legislation or issue

2. Express Your View— However, be sympathetic to the legislator's position or opinion.

Remember, public officials are elected to represent the interest of the public. They need to stay in touch with the public, and likewise, you (the public) need to stay in touch with elected officials.

Views can be expressed through —

- **Meetings/visits** — Arrange a meeting in advance, if possible. During the meeting, be specific, concise, and polite. Always thank the legislator for his or her time.
- **Telephone calls** — Make a list of the points you wish to convey and tell the legislative assistant why you are calling. When talking with the legislator, be specific, concise, and polite. Always thank the legislator for his or her time.
- **Written correspondence** — Discuss one issue per letter, state your position on the bill by reasons and facts, request the legislator's position on the issue, and be brief, concise, and polite. Always thank the individual for his/her consideration. Avoid form letters. **Be judicious in the use of e-mail messages.**

3. Organize Your Opinions — No elected official can afford to ignore the weight of public opinion.

4. Be an Active Voter

WHAT ONE SHOULD NOT DO

1. Don't threaten or pressure an elected official
2. Don't be vague
3. Don't apologize for taking his/her time
4. Don't be offended or upset if he/she disagrees with your issue or point of view, and don't be rude

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