



Do's and Don'ts of Lobbying

- DO look for friends in unusual places. In politics, a friend is someone who works with you on a particular issue – whether a Democrat or Republican, liberal or conservative – even if that person or group opposes you on every other issue.
- DON'T promise anything you cannot deliver. Your word is your bond.
- DO know the legislative calendar and its constraints. Far too often, officials meet with their lawmakers to request legislation to alleviate some problem within their communities – only to find out they have missed the deadline for new legislation. Lawmakers will respect your opinions more if it is obvious you understand the legislative process and its constraints.
- DON'T lie or mislead a legislator about the relative importance of an issue, the opposition's position or strength, or any other matter.
- DO know when to contact your legislators. Never assume that your opinion will not matter on a piece of legislation. Lawmakers need your input. Never forget that your constituents are also their constituents. To be an effective lobbyist for your community, you need open lines of communication with your lawmakers.
- DON'T cut off anybody from contact. Do not let a legislator consider you a bitter enemy because you disagree; today's opponent may be tomorrow's ally.
- DO know when “not” to contact your legislators. Every effective lobbyist knows not to “go to the well” too often. Not every piece of legislation will devastate your community. It is essential for your lawmakers to recognize that when you call, it is important. Never bother them with trivial matters.
- DON'T get mad. “When you are crossed politically, don't get mad. Get even.” (Bobby Kennedy) The power of ballot box is yours.
- DO provide lawmakers with accurate and factual information. Never use incomplete, outdated or simply inaccurate information when presenting your case. If your lawmakers do not believe your information is credible, your pleas will fall on deaf ears.
- DON'T threaten your lawmakers – either implicitly or explicitly. You do not like to be threatened, neither do they. Never imply public reprisals from “back home” if a lawmaker does not support your position. No tactic can permanently close lines of communication faster.

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- DO make certain you communicate a unified position. If your lawmaker has reason to believe that your position does not represent a unified position within your community, your efforts will carry little weight. Convince your lawmakers your position represents as many groups and organizations as possible.
- DON'T waste time on opponents who are publicly committed to their position. It is more productive to shore up known allies and to lobby legislators who are least committed or who claim to be neutral or keeping an open mind.
- DO understand your lawmakers. If a lawmaker disagrees with your viewpoint on certain legislation, do not be quick to criticize. Remember that lawmakers must represent all of the constituents within your area, not just you. Many lobbyists have found out too late that burned bridges, stay burned. Successful lobbyists build bridges, not burn them.
- DON'T gossip. Knowing legislators' peculiarities and peccadilloes is one thing; talking about them is another. Remember that discretion is the better part of valor.
- DO share the spotlight. No lawmaker appreciates doing most of the work to correct some problem in your community, without sharing in the credit.
- DON'T forget to notice and thank anyone who has helped you. The "good ole boy/good ole girl" system is alive and well.
- DON'T grad credit. "Nothing is impossible if it does not matter who gets the credit."
- DO carry a rabbit's foot. In lobbying you can know your opponent; you can develop imaginative and reasonable compromises; you can burn the midnight oil to digest all the arguments; but it can all go right down the drain if you don't have a little luck.