

ADVOCACY

Children's Advocacy Days 2006

KNOW THE PROCESS

Doors Can be Closed as Easily as They Can be Opened

For the professional lobbyist, knowing the process means knowing a multitude of formal rules and procedures of the legislature. If you are a citizen advocate, you must have a familiarity with the rules and procedures, or know where to find them if you are not familiar with them.

Be Honest.

Never lie or mislead a legislator about the relative importance of an issue or the opposition's position or strength. Your credibility rests on your honesty. Never promise anything you cannot deliver. Your word is your bond.

Be Friendly.

Never 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. You may be firm in your discussion without being hostile. Never make threats.

Look for Friends in Unusual Places.

In politics, a friend is a politician who helps you when you need help, whether a Democrat or a Republican, liberal or conservative—even if that politician is hostile to you 90% of the time.

Do Not Grab Credit.

Nothing is impossible if it does not matter who gets the credit.

Decide Priorities.

Don't waste time on opponents who are publicly committed to their position. It is more productive to lobby legislators who claim to be neutral or who are keeping an open mind. Don't neglect those who are "probably" committed to your point of view. Friends should not be taken for granted.

Give Thanks.

Never forget to notice and thank anyone who has helped you.

Do Not Gossip.

Knowing legislator's peculiarities is one thing; talking about them is another. Remember that discretion is the better part of valor.

Do Not Get Angry.

"When you are crossed politically, don't get mad. Get even." Bobby Kennedy stated that the power of the ballot box is yours.

Be Prepared.

Spend the time needed to learn as much as possible about your issue. Practice discussing it until you feel confident. If you don't know the answer to a legislator's question, say so—but offer to find out and follow up with information.

Exhibiting Inappropriate Behavior.

Sexist or racist remarks are too offensive to need further comment. However, there is a more subtle type of inappropriate behavior. When a legislator is meeting with another legislator or with his/her staff, they should not be interrupted. Know their boundaries and respect them.

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 of the arguments; but it can all go right down the drain if you don't have a little luck.

Coming in With Last-Minute Requests.

Legislators realize there are times when these requests cannot be avoided. An amendment to a bill may not be ready or a fiscal note may be incomplete. However, if you choose for whatever reason to do little or nothing throughout the legislative session, legislators will be very irritated with last-minute "I gotta have your help" requests. A better way to ensure your bill progresses through the legislative process is to be involved and prepared throughout the session, not just in the closing days.