

Effective Lobbying Is Getting Votes! 27 Fundamentals for Successful Lobbying

1. Your threshold question for each lawmaker is, "Why would this lawmaker give me his or her vote?" Until you can answer that question, you are not likely to get the vote.
2. Your answer is, "Because I have what this lawmaker wants." If you don't, go home.
3. Lawmakers are your "customers." Customers buy to meet their needs, not yours.
4. The more you look like your customer, the more likely you'll make the sale.
5. Lawmakers are not like you - and the longer they're in office the less they're like you.
6. Winning a lawmaker's vote is 10% access and 90% heat. Access is easy. "Political heat" is a few active higher-level constituents, both in- and out-of-district.
7. Get past "nice" to get lawmakers' votes. A lawmaker's being nice isn't a vote
8. "Lobbying is a dance of seduction." Find and use each lawmaker's susceptibilities.
9. "Facts don't vote." A lawmaker votes his or her own peculiar political calculus. Seldom are technical facts enough to get votes; but political facts may be all it takes.
10. 70% of winning a lawmaker's vote occurs before talking to the lawmaker.
11. Lawmakers are almost wholly motivated by special interests. Lobby the special interests that put and keep a lawmaker in power before you lobby that lawmaker.
12. 80-90% of lawmakers are irrelevant to your winning or losing your bill. The relevant ones are on key committees; plus the few, if any, other lawmakers who actually care.
13. Convince relevant lawmakers to partner with you. You must show each why working with you is good for him or her, politically. "Self-interest is the engine of government."
14. Most lawmakers' votes are won or lost at fish fries, not in committee meetings.
15. Most committee meetings are theater since the votes were committed at the fish fry.
16. "The lower you shoot, the higher you hit." Lobby staff, then members of the committee of first reference, its chair, then gatekeeper committees. Lobby leadership last, if at all.
17. There is no unimportant staff. You may not need a staff person's support, but you can't afford his or her opposition. Build warm relationships with staff!
18. The more work you do for lawmakers and especially staff the more likely your ideas will become law. Materials that don't help them do their jobs end up in the trash!
19. Legislatures operate on 3 types of rules: 1) written; 2) unwritten; 3) unwritten and unspoken. Violate any of the 3 and you will be disrespected as being ill-informed.
20. Unwritten rule 1- you have to talk to people you don't like, and who don't like you.
21. Unwritten and unspoken rule 1- "Thou shalt make campaign contributions" to be a long-term capitol player. Money is good; constituent support better; both is best.
22. Coalitions are indispensable. They exist for advantage - not for love, loyalty, or debt. Don't pre-qualify or disqualify a potential partner. "Politics makes strange bedfellows."
23. Most contract lobbyists have little personal political power. Don't confuse a lobbyist's ability to say "hi" to a lawmaker with the ability to get that lawmaker's vote.
24. Your contract lobbyist should be a better lobbyist for the legislature overall. Your members should be better lobbyists for their districts' lawmakers.
25. The best time to lobby is when you don't need anything.
26. Agencies promulgate 90% of laws. This means what the legislature giveth an agency can taketh away; and what the legislature wouldn't give you an agency might.
27. Nobody cares about your issue as much as you do. Neither money nor the best contractors can win your battles for you. If you don't make it happen, then it won't.

“While I am a lobbying veteran, the workshop and book provided me with a fresh perspective on advocacy. Mr. Guyer’s clear structure and methodology for an effective lobbying campaign added to my own effectiveness with the legislature contributing to me being ranked one of the five best lobbyists in the state of Florida.”

Desinda Wood Carper

Senior Legislative Advocate (former)

Florida League of Cities

Currently Chief of Staff to Florida state Rep. Sharon Pritchett

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