

Ten Commandments of Lobbying

Some rules for ALL the ways in which you speak out . . .

I. Be honest

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

II. 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.

III. Look for friends in unusual places

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

IV. Do not grab credit

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

V. 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. But don't neglect those who are "probably" committed to your point of view. *Friends* should not be taken for granted.

VI. Give thanks

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

VII. Do not gossip

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

VIII. Don't get angry

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

IX. Be prepared

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

X. 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.

Speak Out:

Your government needs to hear the voice of the advocate

Government officials are persons who've been given the power — either by election or by appointment — to make decisions that affect people's lives. If these officials hear about only one side of an issue, it's unlikely that their decisions will be fair and just. On issues you care about, **your government officials need input from you.** When you speak out to government officials as an individual or as a member of a citizen group, you become a public policy advocate: a citizen lobbyist. The following are some tips to help you make sure your voice is heard.

Speak out by letter

1. Send your letter in time to affect the official's decision. *Don't put it off!*
2. Make sure your letter can be easily read. Type it or write it clearly by hand.
3. Use *your own words* to get your message across. Don't copy a form letter, or even parts of one. *If you make the letter entirely your own, your thoughts and convictions will show your sincerity and concern.*
4. Sign your full name and address so the legislator or other government official can reply to you.
5. Make your position clear. Say exactly what it is you wish the government official to do. If possible, refer to the issue you're writing about by its official title (such as "House Bill 1111" or "the omnibus domestic violence bill"). Write about only one proposed bill or issue in each letter.
6. Give your own personal experience to support your request. Tell briefly how the issue will affect you, your organization and those it serves, your community, etc.
7. Ask the official to state his/her position on the issue in a reply to you.
8. Address the government official correctly:
The Honorable (*name of official*)
State Senator (*or State Representative*) (*or Governor of Missouri*)
State Capitol, Room (*office room number*)
Jefferson City, MO 65101

Dear Senator (*last name*), (*or Governor*), (*or Representative*),
9. Try to limit your letter to no more than two pages; one is better. If you are sending additional materials, *remember the three-point rule . . .*
10. State your case in three points; make it understandable in three minutes; limit your paper to three pages.

Speak out by e-mail

- 1.** Choose a formal format, like that of the letter presented on the previous page.
- 2.** Include your full name, address, telephone number; not just your e-mail address. Identify yourself as a constituent of the legislator's district or as an advocate with a program that provides services to citizens of the district.
- 3.** Reference the issue or number of the bill that concerns you in the subject line.
- 4.** Summarize your concerns in the beginning of the e-mail.
- 5.** Describe briefly how the issue will affect you, your organization and those it serves, your community, etc.
- 6.** Request a response from the official stating his/her position on the issue.

Speak out by personal visit and by telephone

Face-to-face visits are one of the most effective ways to lobby government officials because they offer a way for people to relate to each other *as persons*. Telephone conversations also can establish a positive personal contact between you and the official.

Most state legislators have an office in their home district where they welcome visits and phone calls from constituents. It is even more effective to invite your legislators to your agency, organization or program office for a meeting to learn of your services and priorities. *You are more likely to have more time to spend with your legislators in their home district than you are in the State Capitol building. This is especially true for members of Congress.*

Senators and representatives have office staff at their Capitol offices who can help you reach your legislator for a visit in person or by telephone. Don't hesitate to ask for this help.

Personal visits

- 1.** If possible, schedule your visit to a legislator's Capitol or district office well in advance.
- 2.** Be prepared for your visit in the Capitol to be brief. A 10-minute meeting is a long meeting; most are three to five minutes in length. This is not a sign of disrespect.
- 3.** Limit the group of visitors to no more than three people. Most offices are small.
- 4.** Aim for a friendly conversation — *not a confrontation*.
- 5.** Follow the guide on giving testimony (on the next page) in presenting your case, but encourage the legislator to give you his/her views on the bill or issue, too.
- 6.** If the legislator wants more information, supply it as quickly as possible, but never promise more than you can deliver. Always end your meeting with a thank you.

Telephone calls

- 1.** Telephone calls should be kept brief and to the point.
- 2.** Respect the legislator's busy schedule and be as courteous as if you were visiting in person. Don't be discouraged if you cannot speak directly to the legislator; messages from constituents matter and are delivered by staff.
- 3.** Follow the Ten Commandments!

Speak out by testimony

When you speak before a group of government officials who are conducting a public hearing on a proposed law or a government policy, your remarks are called “*testimony*.”

These hearings, often required by law, are opportunities for citizens to tell whether they are “for” or “against” a bill or a policy. Officials may not always want to hear what citizens have to say, but citizens always have a right to be heard at an official public hearing. It’s important to know that, and to take advantage of it.

When you testify — whether it is in a formal hearing, a face-to-face meeting or another type of public forum — follow these general rules:

- 1.** Be brief and to the point — so you keep the officials interested in what you have to say. Try not to repeat what others have already said.
- 2.** Face the group (committee) of officials when you speak, and begin by identifying yourself. Tell whom you represent, what your organization does, what it stands for, the number of members it has, what other group it is affiliated with, i.e. MCADV.
- 3.** Give a clear statement of your position on the issue: “*We are opposed to this bill and urge you to vote against it.*” Then state the reasons for your position. Don’t try to be more of an expert than you are — just give your own reasons for your position, in your own words. Your sincerity is a valuable asset.
- 4.** If possible, give examples to support your position. If you have case histories, statistical data, etc., give it to the committee in written form and summarize it orally. Be careful to provide a limited amount of paper: three pages, if possible.
- 5.** *Don’t ever read your whole statement!* Use notes, an outline, or whatever you need. Eye contact with the persons you’re addressing is very important.
- 6.** End your remarks by thanking the committee and offering to answer any questions the members have.
- 7.** Dress neatly; appearance is important to some. But dress comfortably, so you can relax and *be yourself*.
- 8.** Legislative committees will accept written testimony when an interested person or group can’t be present to testify in person. However, unless the chairman or a committee member asks for and uses this written statement, it will receive little attention.

Excerpt from *Speak Out: A Short Guide to Citizen Lobbying in Missouri*, produced by the Coalition for Sensible and Humane Solutions