

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.

Understanding the rules. Part of knowing the process involves having an understanding of the rules. When you understand rules, you will function with more confidence and will work comfortably in an environment of “bills, amendments to bills, committees, floor actions, vetoes,” and much more. In addition, you will have developed a vocabulary that allows you to communicate meaningfully in this environment. (See *Glossary*)

Knowing the network.

Roles & Responsibilities

- ♦ Become familiar with the roles and responsibilities of legislative leaders, information about and interests of legislators, and the responsibilities of key staff.

Function, Availability & Location

- ♦ Know the function, availability, or location of the following: the governor and other constitutional officers; key state agencies and their leaders; the research library and information offices; capitol tours; parking spots; restaurants; and social gathering spots of legislators and other movers and shakers.

Conducting Yourself.

- ♦ *BE POLITE* in all your dealings with legislators and staff. It is easy to drift over the boundary when you feel strongly about an issue. Don't be too aggressive, too forward, or too pushy.

REMEMBER: Doors can be closed to you just as easily as they can be opened.

Just as there are certain traits that you must have to advocate successfully, there are also behaviors that will not serve you well. Among these are the following:

Threatening a legislator. Threats are rare, but they do occur. Usually the threat goes something like, “I'll get you in the next election.” Anyone who makes such a threat will lose that legislator's support. News of a threat will spread quickly along the legislative grapevine and more credibility will be lost.

Exhibiting inappropriate behavior. Sexist or racist remarks are too offensive to need further comment here. 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.

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Making disparaging remarks about legislators who oppose your position. It is often stated but bears repeating: Today's opponent may be next week's supporter. You need them more than they need you. Be sure not to "burn your bridges."

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.