

# LOBBYING 101

## GET PERSONALLY ACQUAINTED

As a businessperson, you should become personally acquainted with your State Senator and Representative. Take a sincere interest in them, and get to know their political philosophies. If you contact your legislators only when you want their support on a legislative matter, it may be too late. It is better to be in touch with them throughout their term of office, thereby creating an ongoing, working relationship.

## EXPRESS YOURSELF

Surprisingly, few people ever contact their legislators. This reluctance usually results from the belief that legislators have no time or inclination to answer their phones or read their mail and the belief that a single contact will not make an impact. Yet, in most cases, these views are wrong. Thoughtful and persuasive contacts can change a legislator's mind and bring about a review of his or her positions.

Although a telephone call can be productive, personal face-to-face contact is the most effective approach. Written communications are also effective, and often a follow-up letter will reinforce a personal discussion.

Try to talk to your legislators when they are at home because they are more likely to listen and respond positively in a local environment. Legislators need to be directly exposed to the people they represent and that includes you, a local businessperson. Furthermore, elected officials need to know what you think about the issues facing your community and the state, and how pending legislation will affect your operation.

## BE ORIGINAL

Communicate your own views, not someone else's. A personalized letter is far better than a form letter. Form letters often receive form replies. Give local facts and opinions concerning the effects of a particular issue or proposed bill on your business.

## WRITTEN COMMUNICATION

When writing your legislators make sure to identify the bill you are writing about unless you are discussing a general subject. Give the number of the bill, and a brief description of its subject matter. There are hundreds of bills introduced early in a session, and over a 1,000 by the end. A legislator cannot be expected to recall every one of them merely by a number or vague description.

In your correspondence, be brief, specific, and to the point. Many issues are complex, but your opinions and arguments have a better chance of being read if they are stated as concisely as the subject will permit. Remember your letter will be competing for time and attention with others. Most viewpoints can be amply set forth in a carefully written one-page letter. Also, always remember to state specifically what action you want the legislator to take on the issue.

Although each legislator has an office room number, letters can be addressed as follows:

- ↵ Senator John Doe, Statehouse, Topeka, KS 66612.

## ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION

All legislators have legislative e-mail addresses and check their accounts regularly during the legislative session. Individual addresses can be found at <http://www.kslegislature.org/legsrv-legisportal/index.do>. When sending an e-mail remember to reference the specific issue or bill number that concerns you and keep it brief. Time is of the essence during the busy legislative session and when the legislators read your e-mail that it is to the point.

## PHONE CALLS

While face-to-face contact on weekends and individual letters are often better than telephone calls, sometimes a phone call is needed.

The Legislative Reference Library maintains a toll free number (800-432-3924), and will ask legislators to return your call using the KANS-A-N telephone network. The general number for the State Senate and the State House of Representatives is (785) 296-0111.

## EVALUATE THE ISSUES

Just because a bill is introduced in the legislature is no guarantee that it will become law. The majority will not. A bad bill usually dies of its own inertia, and it may be unwise to attract too much attention to it. Give priority in your lobbying to those issues that are most important to you and your business. Limit the number of bills you contact a legislator about, but do not be afraid to go when the business community's viewpoint needs to be expressed.

## DEAL WITH PRINCIPLES

Emphasize the principles that are more important than specifics because if your legislators really support business, then most of your battles will be won.

## RECOGNIZE LEGISLATORS PROBLEMS

Your legislators represent all of the constituents in your area - rural and urban, rich and poor, liberal and conservative, business and labor. Their duty is to represent all of the people to the best of their ability. Legislators are often caught in crossfire between conflicting interests and opinions. Sometimes, their votes may be contrary to your opinion as a businessperson. Present your position logically and base it on facts. Emotional appeals do not influence a vote. There may be times when you think your legislators are on the wrong track, but they may have facts that are not available to you. Try to understand their obstacles, outlook and objectives.

## OTHER SUGGESTIONS

Never threaten your legislator if he or she refuses to see an issue your way. Few respond positively to such statements and they effectively preclude positive relations with that legislator in the future.

If you request introduction of a bill by your legislator or are concerned by a particular bill, let the WIBA staff know. This helps avoid embarrassment and miscommunication among the various actors in the legislative process. It is likely someone is already working on the measure. In some instances, WIBA may be able to support your efforts.

Be timely. Inform your legislator of your views while there is still time for him or her to take action. Contacts with legislators before a committee vote and before floor action by the committee of the whole, in both chambers of the legislature, are most effective.

Be accurate with your facts and make good arguments about any issues you discuss with your legislators. Make sure you understand the particular bill in question and how it applies to your business. Sometimes a bill can change drastically through an amendment, so confirm with your legislator that the bill draft you have is in fact the draft currently under consideration.

Be fair and reasonable. Inform your legislator of opposing viewpoints that he or she may encounter, and any counter arguments you may have.

Most controversial legislation is the result of compromise -- that is the way the system works. There will be times when legislation does not go your way, so do not be too critical when that happens. Keep a sense of perspective about the legislative process.

Do not be argumentative. Make your point, but do not engage in a quarrelsome debate. Your objective is to convince your legislator of the correctness of your views and not the stupidity of his or her opinions.

Do not overstate your case. Not every proposed bill is going to wreck your business, and legislators give little credence to exaggerated claims unless they can be proven conclusively.

#### FOLLOW UP YOUR REQUEST

If you have made your request for a certain action -- in person, by letter or telephone call -- follow it through. Ask your legislator to let you know what happened to the bill. Recognize that some legislators do not like this request for "accountability," especially if they voted contrary to your request.

#### SHOW YOUR APPRECIATION

When your legislators do a good job on a piece of legislation, tell them about it. Do not take it for granted that they know you are appreciative of their efforts. Also, let others know how the elected official helped you with the issue. Write editorials and newsletters praising the legislators for their efforts. These efforts will take you a long way in developing a positive relationship

with elected officials.

#### GIVE THEM YOUR SUPPORT

If you believe your legislators deserve re-election, do not hesitate to get involved when they are campaigning for another term. That is the time they need your help most of all. Volunteering to work on their campaign or making a donation to them directly or to the Independent Business PAC are some of the most effective ways you may have influence over your legislators in the future.