

Effective Lobbying Is Getting Votes!

25 Fundamentals for Successful State Lobbying

Robert L. Guyer, Esq.

1. Your threshold question of each lawmaker is, "Why would that lawmaker give me his or her vote?" Until you can answer that question, you are not likely to get the vote.
2. Lawmakers are your "customers." Customers buy to meet their needs, not yours.
3. Winning a lawmaker's vote is 10% access and 90% heat. Access is easy. "Political heat" is a few active trustworthy constituents, both those in- and out-of-district.
4. Get past "nice" to get lawmakers' votes. A lawmaker's being "nice" isn't a vote.
5. "Lobbying is a dance of seduction." Find and use each lawmaker's susceptibilities.
6. "Facts don't vote." A lawmaker votes his or her own peculiar political calculus. Seldom are material facts alone sufficient to get votes; political facts may be.
7. 70% of winning a lawmaker's vote occurs before talking to the lawmaker.
8. 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.
9. 80-90% of lawmakers are irrelevant to your winning or losing your bill. The relevant ones are on key committees and the few, if any, who actually care.
10. Lobby first to get those few relevant lawmakers to "partner" with you. You must show each why partnering with you is good for him or her, politically.
11. Most lawmakers' votes are won or lost at fish fries, not in committee meetings.
12. Most committee meetings are theater since the votes were committed at the fish fry.
13. 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!
14. "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.
15. 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!
16. Legislatures operate on 3 types of rules: 1) written; 2) unwritten; 3) unwritten and unspoken. Violate any of the 3 and your influence with lawmakers will suffer!
17. Unwritten rule 1- you have to talk to groups you don't like, and who don't like you.
18. Unwritten and unspoken rule 1- "Thou shalt make campaign contributions" to be a long-term capitol player. Money is good; constituent support is better.
19. 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."
20. Most contract lobbyists have little personal political power. Don't confuse a lobbyist's ability to say "hi" to the lawmaker with the ability to get that lawmaker's vote.
21. Your contract lobbyist should be a better lobbyist for the legislature overall. Your members should be better lobbyists for their districts' lawmakers.
22. The best time to lobby is when you don't need anything.
23. What the legislature giveth an executive agency can taketh away. And what the legislature wouldn't give you, an executive agency might. Implementation of laws belongs solely to agencies. You have nothing until you get the right agency rules!
24. Facts, law, a desire to carry out its mission, and its own politics motivate an agency. Show the agency how doing what you want achieves what it wants.
25. 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, it won't.