Meeting with Elected Officials

Use these helpful tips when meeting with elected officials.

Make a Courtesy Call:

- Attempt to get to know your elected official first. It is best to get acquainted with elected officials on an informational basis, before you really need something. This may be the single most important aspect of dealing with elected officials and a must if you are to have major success.
- You may still get the help you need on your first courtesy call, but you will be in a much better position if your elected official already knows you and your concerns.

Be Prepared:

- While an initial meeting with an elected official may be a "meet and greet", you also carry the responsibility of providing them with facts and positions on issues.
- Educate yourself on the issue(s) to be addressed and develop an understanding of the legislative process. Your specific request for action should be predicated on the status of the issue(s).
- When meeting with elected officials, bring along information and materials supporting your position on issue(s). It is important to clearly demonstrate the impact or benefits associated with a particular issue.
- Offer elected officials and staff that you can a resource in the areas of your expertise.
- You can schedule appointments either by e-mail or telephone. It is a great idea to reconfirm, as schedules do change.
- Study your elected officials. This has become so much easier using A.I. Collect and maintain detailed biographical profiles that include their personal likes and dislikes, as well as any historical data regarding the issues of concern to you. Staffers can also provide photographs and biographies. Current legislative directories are also key sources of information.
- Develop a clear and concise statement regarding the specific action you want an elected official to take.
- Practice your brief, oral presentation. Key arguments should be presented in the beginning of the meeting, as elected officials often leave meetings to attend hearings or cast votes. Expect interruptions.
- Prepare a concise written statement, highlighting key points of our visit, to present to the elected official at the conclusion of the meeting.

Meeting With Staff:

- Staffers are the individuals who know the most about your issue. They prepare the briefing information for their legislator and report on their meetings with constituents. It is important to become acquainted with your legislator's staff members.
- Oftentimes, it is the relationships you have developed with the staffers that can get you the appointment with the elected official.

The Meeting:

- Be on time! Otherwise, you may miss the appointment.

- Circumstances may prevent the elected official from attending the meeting. In this instance, speak with the appropriate legislative assistant or staffer.
- As you previously practiced, state your position and specific request. Then focus on the problem, concern, bill or issue at hand, addressing how it affects you, your job or your industry.
- Offer to provide additional information in the future. Remember – you can serve as a valuable resource to public officials about the subject.
- Watch the time and stay on schedule. Do not overstay your welcome unless the elected official is engaged in the issue/subject matter.
- If the elected official doesn't agree with your position, be cordial, it's best to foster the relationship. Elected officials have been known to change their minds over time. They may agree with you on another important issue in the future even if they disagree with you on a current issue.
- Engage the person you're meeting with. Don't just talk at them.
- Make reasonable and specific requests. For example, rather than asking them to "support your industry", ask them to cosponsor a specific piece of legislation.

Meeting Alternative:

- Meet with U.S. Representatives when they are home in their districts. It may not be possible to meet when they are in Washington, D.C.
- Host a meeting or event at your office or property, or even in their district office.
- Meet with elected officials at one of your member's venues.
- Personalize the event to provide a more casual atmosphere. This will assist you in forming a relationship.

Follow-Up:

- Follow up with a "thank you" letter to include a summary of the key points of your meeting and any commitments made by the elected official or by you.
- Send along any additional information or materials discussed in the meeting.
- Stay in touch. The first visit is the most challenging. Subsequent meetings should be easier.

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