



The Art of Politics  
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## **A**ction Steps for Effective Advocacy

Taking Steps to Position yourself for influence with your State Legislators:

- 1. Identify your State Representative(s) and Senator(s) and build a relationship with them that puts you on a first name basis:** Legislators listen most carefully to their constituents and to individuals they know and trust. As a goal, you want legislators to think of calling you first when they are considering a decision that might impact you or your cause. As a general rule, a focus on relationship should come before issues unless and until trust is established. Don't wait for a crisis before beginning the process of building a relationship with a legislator.
- 2. Know your elected official, their hot button issues, their history, their decision making style and their pet peeves:** Let's face it; the better you know an elected official, the less likely you are to inadvertently offend them. An innocent comment that conjures up bad memories or a pet peeve can end an advocacy contact before it even begins. Take time in advance of your meeting with a legislator to learn about their background, interests and life history. Good lobbying is a healthy combination of "sales" and "psychology".
- 3. Invite legislators to participate in an event or activity related to your area of concern so they can move from observer to participant to ownership in the cause:** Why do you think police departments invite legislators to participate in a "ride-along" with their officers? A visit to your school, before the heat of a legislative session occurs, will provide you with an opportunity to build rapport in a low pressure setting and to begin the process of making a case for your legislative objective(s).
- 4. Be a good citizen in your community. Support and sponsor charitable and public service causes. Be visible and active in such efforts.**
- 5. Whenever possible, broaden your impact and voice by forming coalitions with other groups:** Protection is often found in numbers...you always want to make the "steal" seem more expensive than it's worth!
- 6. Know the rules of engagement and understand the legislative decision making process on a state level:** Strategic advantage on an issue is often gained because of a solid understanding of the process. As an example, 90% of your work in persuading leaders should be complete in advance of a Legislative Hearing...many times a decision is made before the hearing begins!

# The Ten Commandments of Advocacy

## 1. **Get in the game.**

“If you aren’t at the table, you may find yourself on the menu” is a true saying that illustrates the importance of staying meaningfully engaged in the legislative process in Oregon. Decisions that are made by the Oregon Legislators can impact the way you work, live and play...it’s important that they understand how their actions impact you and the groups you care about. Remember, when it comes to the Legislative process, the saying “you must be present to win” really applies!

## 2. **Never lie or provide false and misleading information to a legislator or local government official!**

Avoid any communication that misrepresents the facts surrounding an issue, the opposition’s position, or any other matter. In addition, be careful to avoid promising more than you can deliver...Your word is your bond. In politics, you have your word and your friends; go back on either and you’re dead.

## 3. **Build quality relationships first and then seek to persuade.**

Don’t ever wait for State or Local Government to come to you (because sooner or later Government will impact the issues you care about)...Instead be proactive by identifying and meeting your state and local elected officials. Don’t wait for a crisis or the last minute to introduce yourself...If you do, the quality of your persuasion will be significantly diminished. After all, isn’t it true that it is far easier to negatively impact someone you don’t know? Effectiveness in lobbying requires that the bridge of relationship be strong enough to withstand the weight of conflict or crisis.

## 4. **Look for friends in unusual places.**

In politics, a friend is someone who works with you on a particular issue whether a Democrat or Republican, liberal or conservative – even if that person or group opposes you on every other issue. Look for help in unexpected places and avoid the temptation to assume an elected officials position until you give them your pitch and allow them an opportunity to respond...you might just be surprised.

## 5. **Do not threaten, scold, personally attack or embarrass a public official.**

Offending an elected official in this way is almost always irrecoverable. Count on the political process to frustrate you because of unfairness and a lack of good will, but don’t allow anger to get the best of you. Losing your cool by lashing out at a legislator can turn an opponent into an enemy actively pursuing revenge. Anger is not a strategy. Do not let a legislator consider you a bitter enemy because you disagree; today’s opponent may be tomorrow’s ally.



**6. Keep your eye on the “main thing” and don’t stop to kick every barking dog...make every contact with an elected official count.**

In other words, avoid being a pest...Don’t ask for too much too often...if you do, your opinion will be discounted. Respect an elected official’s time and remember that most elected officials have a full-time job in addition to serving the state or community.

**7. Do not waste time on opponents who are publicly committed to their position.**

Sometimes legislators will adopt opinions publicly on an issue. If this occurs, it is often more productive to shore up known allies and to lobby legislators who are less committed or who claim to be neutral or are keeping an open mind. If your legislator/local government official has adopted a public opinion that is contrary to yours, let that legislator know why you disagree, ask for reconsideration, and provide additional information. It is ideal to reach an elected official before they tie themselves to a public position that is nearly impossible to backtrack from.

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

Take the time to notice when you’re elected official votes favorably on an issue and drop them a note or make a phone call to say thank you. A prompt, generous letter of thanks can seal a commitment which otherwise might disappear when the going gets tough.

**9. Do not gossip.**

Knowing legislators’ peculiarities and peccadilloes is one thing; talking about them is another. Remember that discretion is the better part of valor. Keep what you know personally about a legislator/local government official out of any conversation you have publicly or privately.

**10. Be knowledgeable on your issues.**

Elected officials depend on individuals and organizations that are competent to provide timely, accurate information on issues...make sure you are on their list!