

The Ten Commandments of Lobbying

1. **Do your homework, be well informed and ready.** Learn as much as you can about your issue(s). Be able to explain how you, your children, your school and your legislator's district will be affected. Know what your opponents' arguments will be. Anticipate questions and be prepared with answers. Be an expert: know what the whole issue is, who it affects and possible future trends. Your legislator and legislative staff are following 3,000 bills. Each legislator will vote on 1,500 bills. They cannot know all they would like to know about each issue or the nuances within issues. They rely on others who have personal experience and are well informed to educate them.
2. **Tell the truth.** Legislators rely on others to provide them with the information, examples and arguments they need to make decisions. You only get one shot at credibility. Once it is lost, it is lost forever. Don't stretch, embellish or fudge information. If you do not know an answer, don't fake it. If you promise to find out, do so, do it soon and get back to them when you do know the answer.
3. **Thank people who help.** Everybody likes a pat on the back. Don't worry about getting credit. Give credit to others easily and often. Getting the job done is your most important accomplishment. A thank you travels great distances.
4. **Know how the process works.** It is essential that you have a basic understanding of how the whole legislative picture looks. See this link for how an idea becomes a law: <http://www.tlc.state.tx.us/gtli/legproc/diagram.html> . This will help you see the eleven points where you can influence the course of legislation. It will help you understand timing of your input and where to expect to meet your opponents.
5. **Get to know your legislator(s) and legislative staff.** Legislators rely heavily on information and analysis they receive from their professional staff. Your personal knowledge and relationship with the staff and your legislator allows you to be included in their thinking process. Remember that trust is not quickly built, not gained in one meeting. Develop a comfort level over time with legislators and staff. Always, always, always be polite to staff. They will be more responsive and friendly to responsive and friendly advocates.
6. **Build coalitions and take your friends where you find them.** Find groups and individuals who agree with you on an issue and work with them, but don't expect them to agree with you on every issue. Honor any agreement you make with coalition members. Don't focus on whether someone is a Democrat or a Republican, conservative or progressive. A friend is anyone who helps you when you need help.
7. **Keep it simple. Work from the KISS principle – Keep It Short and Simple.** Think about what you want and why. Legislators and their staff are busy and appreciate a concise summary or presentation. It is best not to be confrontational and never be antagonistic. A bill or issue can be over-lobbied; know when to let up. Quality, not quantity, is the key.
8. **Know your bottom line.** The legislative process is one of compromise. Legislators like to be able to give something to everyone. Know what is important to you and be willing to compromise on everything else. Ask the legislator for their position and a commitment to a specific course of action.
9. **Know your opponents.** Don't waste time trying to convince those who are publicly committed to an opposing position. Put your energy into swaying undecided votes. On most issues there will be a block firmly in favor – support and praise them; there will be a block firmly opposed – take note of their position and ignore them; and there will be an uncommitted block looking for information and open to either side – they will make the decisions, so win them over.
10. **Work at the local level.** Legislators pay the most attention to their own constituents. Sometimes you can affect the key decision-makers directly, but more often it is best done through local contacts with legislators, media and allies. If you want to have an impact on a legislator from another area, look for a friend who is that legislator's constituent to help you.