

The Elementary Guide to Effecting Change: Practical Tips on How to Influence Policy and Change the World

1. Be Fearless/The Meek Shall Inherit the Earth But They Will Not Change an Ounce of Policy.

Mousiness will get you nowhere. Be polite. Be prepared. But most of all be fearless. Becoming fearless starts with removing the mystery from the advocacy process.

2. Read the Cliff Notes.

No need to be a scholar in parliamentary procedure or an expert in the minutiae of domestic policy. But you do need to understand the basics. When does the Maryland legislature meet? What committees does your representative sit on? Check out the legislature's Web site. Congress provides a Web site on the basics of Congress. With knowledge comes power.

3. Know your facts and how to translate those facts into a compelling message.

You may have 5 minutes with the person you want to influence; you may have an hour; you may have 30 seconds to make your case in a phone conversation. Regardless, you must make an impression in a short period of time based on compelling facts, a summary message that derives from these facts, and stories (see below) to humanize the message.

4. Master the Art of Storytelling/Teach Yourself to Spin a Yarn.

Strong, reliable statistics are great. Being able to provide reliable data will establish you as a valuable resource. Telling a powerful story will make you memorable.

5. Understand the Immense Value of Your Expertise.

One of the greatest minds in the United State's Congress, physicist and Democratic Congressman from New Jersey Rush Holt, when interviewed in the New York Times in August said, "The [life] of a Congressman is like being a television set on whom someone else is changing the channel every 10 minutes." Members of Congress are generalists on a thousand issues and experts on none. State legislators tend to be the same. They have to vote

on a thousand issues every session, meet with public educators one minute and defense industry lobbyists the next. Their staffs also juggle a myriad of issues all at once. Many state legislators have full-time jobs outside of the legislature. That's why, in a national survey conducted by the Kellogg Foundation, state legislators said that **community organizations** and their staff are the resources they rely on most to influence their decisions. Why? They are not out in the community day in and day out working on these issues; you are. And your experience and expertise on the way an issue impacts their constituents is therefore incredibly valuable to them.

6. Let Your Creativity Run Wild. Be Imaginative.

It is a notable truth that well-behaved women and men rarely make history. Why? Because they rarely make the news. To be effective, you need to get your message out and to do so, you need to challenge yourself to approach things in new and different ways.

7. Put it on Paper and Make it Pretty.

If the ability to tell a powerful story is the gold plated hammer in your tool belt, having a great one-page fact sheet is the silver nail. Everyone in this time-craving world is overloaded with information. Don't dumb your issue down, but learn how to be succinct—it will prove invaluable. The goal is not to make policymakers and their staff experts on your issue in one day, but to give them enough information in a well-crafted package so their interest is piqued and they see a value in it. Staff will likely actually read it and pass it along to their boss in their daily briefing materials. Legislators can easily read it on the plane or in the car on their way to your event. It's perfect to include in a letter. "Pretty" doesn't mean pink paper with Elizabethan script and mist of perfume. It means professional and readable. Don't force everything and the kitchen sink onto one page in 8pt. font. Three strong well-chosen statistics are better than ten average ones. Take it easy on their eyes by having a decent amount of white space. And always, always tell them how to find you (name, phone, etc).

8. Know What You Want. Ask for It.

The worst thing you can do is meet with someone and not let them know, when you have them as a captive audience, what they can do to help. Always be prepared to ask for something that will help move your work forward. For example, one legislator cannot single handedly solve the issue of poor end-of-life care in America. But s/he can help convene a meeting of stakeholders in your community to develop a plan of action to improve end-of-life care in the state. And don't be wishy-washy about it. No one likes a

limp handshake and no one responds well to a weak request. If you offer them an escape route, they'll take it. Be gracious, but confident—boosted by the knowledge that the issue, and your involvement with it, are worthy and extremely important.

9. Don't Let Opportunities Pass You By.

Be aware of when local, state or national news, or policy activity, so that you can piggyback on it. If U.S. Department of Labor employment statistics are coming out, is that relevant to your message? When a key court case is being considered, such as the Schiavo case in Florida or the Laci Peterson case, does it give you an opportunity to make your case? Sometimes, you never know when circumstances external to your organization will give you an opening to advocate for your cause. But, stay on top of the news, and be ready to seize the moment.

10. Think Big. Start Small.

No need to master the universe in a day. First things first. Learn how to have an effective meeting with a policymaker. The basic recipe is tried and true. Practice on your dog, get the basics down and you will find, guaranteed, that it works masterfully whether you have 30 minutes in the Governor's office or three minutes at a cocktail party. Five easy steps. 1). Introduce yourself. 2) Explain who you are—describe you program/issue concisely and who it impacts. 3) Explain why you're there—you would like to engage them in your work. 4) Tell a story. 5) Tell them what you want—clearly and concisely. 6) Outline next steps—who's responsible for each and when they will be completed.

11. Persistence Pays/ Never Go Away With Your Hat in Your Hand.

If you wait for them to call you, nothing will ever happen. In some ways, waiting for you to follow up with them is a test that staff places on you to see if you are serious about working together. Polite persistence pays. Read the biographies of any great figure in history, you will see the common tie that binds is their tenacity.

12. If You Can't Open the Front Door Try the Side.

If you can't get a policymaker to pay attention to your issue or sit down with you in person, understand that there are other equally, and sometimes more, effective routes to take. There are direct decision makers—elected officials. There are indirect decision makers—their staff. And there are pressure makers. Staff can be your greatest ally. Policymakers rely heavily on their staff to help with their agenda setting and sort through information

and issues to focus on priorities. Many a policymaker has taken on an issue because their spouse, their faith leader or their college roommate told them it was the right thing to do. Think about the influential web of relationships and you will likely find an ally that can open the door and guide you in.

13. Embrace Time as Your Ally.

The earlier you are involved, the more you can influence the process. Given that the Maryland legislature meets early in the year, start talking to allies, policymakers and their staff in the summer and early fall.

14. Always, Always, Say Thank You /You Learned It While You Were Still in Pigtails and Short Pants

In this modern world of e-mail, handwritten thank you notes have gone the way of the dinosaur. As their rarity increases, so too does their value. Handwritten notes are now extremely memorable items. They will remember that you took the time, and they will remember you.

15. Be Yourself. Be Memorable

This may be the most important tip of all. Don't put on a stiff, "professional" personality for your encounter with someone you want to influence. You are your best salesperson. Show your passion. Be real. Be memorable. Remember: the messenger is more important than the message.

Other thoughts:

- Lobbying isn't just legal—it's important, powerful and fundamental to democracy.
- Find a mentor. Become an apprentice. There is likely someone in your community that you or a friend knows who has been involved in advocacy for some time. Give them a call. Ask them to have lunch with you. Pick their brain. Everyone likes to feel like their experience can be valuable to someone else and this one-on-one tutoring/passage of seasoned wisdom is the best way for you to become a leader as well.
- Always know your opponent's argument and acknowledge it. It adds to your credibility and allows you to set the tone.