



Ten Top Tips for Occasional Lobbyists

By Stewart Clifton

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Professional lobbyist Stewart Clifton, keynote speaker at Tennessee Library Legislative Day in Nashville on January 26, 2011, gave these “Ten Top Tips for Occasional Lobbyists.”

Secretary of State Tre Hargett, left, meets with keynote speaker Stewart Clifton.

1. Develop a relationship before you need the vote. (Legislators' votes are often based more on relationships than on specific beliefs or data.)

How to have a relationship:

- Be part of a group and identify yourself as a group member/representative and act accordingly. Lone-ranger lobbyists seldom succeed!
- Creatively think of ways to build the personal and group relationship over time.
- Send a snail-mail or email communication when an official does something worth noting positively, such as casting a vote you agree with or receiving an honor.
- Introduce or re-introduce yourself when you see the elected official, whether at a political function or a trip to the gas station. Link yourself to your group.
- Make an appointment to introduce yourself, your organization, and/or your issue.
- Make sure your group invites legislators to appropriate meetings to give reports on what they and the legislature did.
- Organize small or medium-size coffees or meetings made up of group members who are constituents for legislators to meet with.
- Remember to focus on those legislators who represent you. A constituent is not just a well-meaning citizen with opinions - anyone can have an opinion. Constituents hire and fire.

- 2. Do your homework on both the legislator and the legislation.** Homework is best done before the test.
- 3. Respect the elected official and the office.** There is obviously a way to disagree without threatening or giving the impression that the legislator is a dope or self-interested. “Respect” does not mean “like” or “agree with.”
- 4. Provide short, clear information, without jargon, not technical articles that go on for pages.** I’m talking one page or the oral equivalent.
- 5. Be honest.** Provide accurate information. Keep your word.
- 6. Check your ego at the door.**
- 7. Burn no bridges and never threaten.** The bridge you burn now may be the one you later have to cross. You can be firm and reasonably passionate about your position, but never be hostile.
- 8. Know that there are no permanent friends or permanent enemies.**
- 9. Set priorities and be focused.**
- 10. Know the formal and informal rules.** Most of the informal ones you learned in kindergarten, and they boil down to “Act Like You Were Raised Right.”