

GUIDELINES FOR LOBBYING

These “maxims” have been developed over time and shared with us by legislators, lobbyists, school committee members, superintendents, and parents who have used them successfully.

They’ll work when you lobby, and they’ll help you understand where constituents for other issues and legislators are coming from.



- 1. NEVER ASSUME ANYTHING.** The legislative and policy making process is unpredictable at every level and subject to all kinds of variables and surprises.
- 2. CHARLIE FLAHERTY’S MAXIM¹: KNOW THE RULES FOR THE TARGETS OF YOUR LOBBYING.** Understand the legislative groundrules, rules of order and legislative process (and how to suspend them), timetables, and leadership hierarchy and work with them.
- 3. DAVID HOLWAY’S LAW²: KNOW THE KEY PROCESS PRESSURE POINTS AND STAY VISIBLE.** Know when you can be most effective, or when decisions are being made including committee votes, procedural votes, and last minute parliamentary steps (including prorogation) in the legislative process.
- 4. BE PREPARED TO LET VICTORY TAKE ITS TIME.** Lobbying requires lots of patience. It may take days, weeks, or years to win all you want. You may find it best to get what you can and build on it later.
- 5. WILBUR MILLS’ MAXIM³: WORK CLOSELY WITH LEGISLATORS’ STAFF.** Legislative staff and aides are important members of the lawmaking team. It is their job to know the issues and brief their boss. Consider an opportunity to meet with staff as an invaluable chance to make your case to someone whose job it is to listen carefully to you.
- 6. EMILY POST’S POSTULATE⁴: BE POLITE ALL THE TIME.** If you’re polite, your targets may remember you well. If you’re rude, they will never forget you. NEVER THREATEN OR ATTEMPT TO EMBARRASS A TARGET OF YOUR LOBBYING OR THEIR STAFF!
- 7. MAHONEY’S LAW⁵: ALWAYS WATCH OUT FOR AN OPPORTUNITY TO TURN AN ADVANTAGE.** You never know when a parliamentary maneuver, news event, absence of a particular person, or some other factor can work for you, or against you. Never stop looking for something you can turn into an advantage.
- 8. MACHIAVELLI’S LAW⁶:** There is no greater friend than he who was once your enemy; nor a greater foe than one who was once a friend. Today’s opponent is tomorrow’s ally, so don’t burn bridges you may need to cross later. Know who’s on your side today and whom you may need later for the follow-up, or another issue.
- 9. WALTER SULLIVAN’S COROLLARY⁷:** Help your friends, but also help your adversaries when they’re in need. There may come a time when your opponent is in trouble or has a personal problem. Be gracious and help them when they’re vulnerable. They will never forget those who reach out to them in difficult times.

¹ Former Speaker of the MA House of Representatives

² Former school committee member and current president of National Association of Government Employees

³ Legendary Chair of the US House Ways and Means Committee, Mills wrote the Medicare Law and had what was considered the best staff in Congress during the 1960s.

⁴ Author of the noted guides to etiquette.

⁵ Thomas H.D. Mahoney was a former school board member, state legislator, MIT Professor and scholar of British Colonial and Parliamentary History.

⁶ The legendary political theorist who advised the Medicis to help their friends and screw their adversaries.

⁷ Former Cambridge, MA mayor who, by the time he retired after a lifetime of politics, actually had his old adversaries voting for him.

10. TIP O'NEILL'S LAW⁸ and the RALPH WRIGHT COROLLARY⁹: All Politics is Local, and All Politics is Personal. Personalize your lobbying without getting personal. Realize that sometimes, personal concerns will outweigh someone's most logical arguments. Respect a lawmaker's willingness to help a constituent.

11. MAYVILLE'S MAXIM¹⁰: No one ever listened themselves into commitments they couldn't fulfill. Be a good listener, respect your targets or lobbyists, and show respect for both.

12. JOHN'S LAW: Use Discretion. Know to whom you're speaking and know who's listening. Never speak of sensitive or confidential political matters in elevators, bathrooms, restaurants, airplanes, or other places unless you know no one else is listening, and that's because of (see Howard's Corollary, below)

13. HOWARD'S COROLLARY¹¹: LOBBYING AND LOITERING ARE VERY CLOSELY RELATED ACTIVITIES. If you're going to be sitting around, do it where it will do you the most good, like gathering intelligence or listening to someone else's conversation.

14. WOOD'S PROVISIO¹²: BE TRUTHFUL. Avoid being "economical" or "careless" with the truth. Lobbying targets respect people they trust all the time. This also applies to reporters.

15. ED ROLLINS'S ADVICE¹³: Don't volunteer information that will come back to bite you.

16. GEORGE KEVERIAN'S LAW¹⁴: WINNING THE DAY IN THE PRESS IS NOT WINNING THE BATTLE IN THE LEGISLATURE. THINK VERY CAREFULLY BEFORE YOU GRANDSTAND OR USE PEOPLE AS LOBBYING PROPS. Dragging children out to hearings and portraying them as victims can backfire, especially if you use them to apply inappropriate pressure to policy makers. Staging a demonstration that attacks the legislature and makes it into tomorrow's newspaper doesn't give your bill has a better chance to become law.

17. LENNY RUSSELL'S LAW: HONOR YOUR COMMITMENTS. Your word is your bond, and word travels fast if your word isn't worth anything.

18. DAMBORG'S LAW¹⁵: Spend Words as You Would Spend Money. Lobbying targets have limited time. You have only a short time to convince them you're credible. And nothing turns off a legislator like someone who just can't shut up. Always know what you're going to say when you get up to speak, testify, or comment in public.

19. MARY NEWMAN'S QUESTION¹⁶: What are the bad guys doing? Keep thinking about your opponents and what they're up to, and plan your strategy accordingly.

20. PAUL BEGALA'S LAW: "Those who can, do. Those who can't, meet." Get out there and get it done. Valuable time can be wasted if you over-plan, over-talk, and just meet too much.

21. ROSE COHEN'S COROLLARY¹⁶: "I can forgive, and I can forget, but I can remember." Alienate as few people as possible. You may not get a second chance to lobby them.

22. YOGI'S ADVICE¹⁸: It ain't over, 'till it's over.

⁸ Speaker of the US House of Representatives who wrote the book "All Politics is Local"

⁹ Speaker of the Vermont House of Representatives for two decades, his book was "All Politics is Personal."

¹⁰ Farmer-Philosopher Alan Mayville as a legislative advocate for senior citizens in New Hampshire.

¹¹ Long time Nebraska, California, and Washington, DC lobbyist David Howard now represents real estate interests on the West Coast.

¹² Dave Wood was a press secretary under MA Governor Mike Dukakis

¹³ George W. Bush press secretary.

¹⁴ Former MA legislator and Speaker of the House

¹⁵ Dean of the Maine political commentators, Damborg was a legend in the Pine Tree State from the 60s through the 80s.

¹⁶ A great liberal Republican state legislator who always asked about candidates, "Who is this person? How does this person think? And, if I had a problem, would this person care about me?"

¹⁷ Grandmother of a former school committee member.

¹⁸ Hall of Fame Catcher for the New York Yankees who was famous for his words of wisdom.