

*The Do's & Don'ts*

# THE DO'S & DON'TS

## HOW TO LOBBY IN CALIFORNIA

BY

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## INTRODUCTION

As an attorney/lobbyist practicing for over twenty years at the State Capitol, I am frequently asked: “Can one person really make a difference?” My response is: “of course”.

I usually share the following story:

While walking along on a beach, an elderly gentleman saw someone in the distance leaning down, picking something up and throwing it into the ocean.

As he got closer, the elderly gentleman noticed that the figure was that of a young man, picking up starfish one by one and tossing each one gently back into the water.

He came closer still and called out, “Good morning! May I ask what you are doing?” The young man paused, looked up, and replied “throwing starfish into the ocean.” The old man smiled, and said “ I must ask, then, why are you throwing starfish into the ocean?” To this, the young man replied, “ The sun is up and the tide is going out. If I don’t throw them in, they’ll die.”

Upon hearing this, the elderly observer commented, “But, young man, do you not realize that there are miles and miles of beach and there are starfish all along every mile? You can’t possibly make a difference!”

The young man listened politely. Then he bent down, picked up another starfish, threw it back into the ocean past the breaking waves and said, “*It made a difference for that one.*”

Not only can one person make a difference, but one person can also make others change their perception of an issue. You have the power in that you have first hand experience as it relates to issues that are most important to you. Let the lawmakers know how you feel about these issues. You must be heard to make a change.

John F. Kennedy once said, “*One person can make a difference and every person should try.*”

This easy to read pamphlet is designed to provide straightforward “tips”, or as I have referred to as the “ Do’s & Don’ts”, on how to easily participate in the complex legislative process so you can effectively communicate your message to lawmakers and make a difference.

## WHO IS YOUR STATE LEGISLATOR?



### **Do:**

- Find out who represents you at the legislature by going to [www.leginfo.ca.gov](http://www.leginfo.ca.gov)
- Learn about your legislator's background
- Learn to properly pronounce your legislator's name
- Know your legislator's political affiliation
- Attend and participate in local events and public meetings with your legislator
- Sign up for your legislator's newsletter or mailing list to receive updates
- Determine where your legislator's District Office is located
- Schedule a face-to-face meeting with your legislator
- Make personal contact with your legislator and staff
- Communicate regularly
- Get to know the staff
- Become a resource for your legislator on issues you are most familiar
- Invite your legislator to speak at your local organization



### **Don't:**

- Assume you know who your legislator is
- Call your legislator and threaten and be rude
- Wait until the last minute to get involved
- Just complain without any reasoning
- Demand anything
- Sit on the fence and do nothing

## PREPARE FOR MEETING WITH LEGISLATOR



### **Do:**

- Plan your visit carefully
- Schedule and confirm appointment ahead of time
- Be prepared and know your stuff
- Organize your thoughts and presentation
- Target your presentation (i.e. support or oppose specific bill)
- Choose the most important points you want to make
- Have printed material, such as fact sheets, available
- Provide reasoning to your arguments
- Keep it short, simple and to the point
- Be honest and make presentation personal
- Practice your presentation
- Anticipate questions that may be asked
- Dress appropriately



### **Don't:**

- Just “drop in” to see your legislator
- Be unprepared
- Plan on “winging it”
- Just complain
- Threaten or antagonize
- Mislead the legislator or staff

## WHAT TO SAY AT THE MEETING

*Do:*

- Be clear on what you want to achieve
- Arrive early, if possible
- Be patient
- Offer your business card to legislators and be positive
- Give reasons why you support or oppose specific measure
- Keep it brief
- Tell a personal story that makes your point, if possible
- Sell your position
- Explain like you are explaining to a 6<sup>th</sup> Grader
- Brevity
- Stay on track. They are interested in what constituents are thinking
- Focus on the issue
- Seek a commitment and ask for support
- Determine whether the legislator will support your position
- Listen carefully
- Be political
- Be responsive
- Leave facts sheets, if possible
- Admit if you don't know an answer to a question, but volunteer to follow up
- Say "thank you" and follow up with a letter

*Don't:*

- Forget to properly introduce yourself
- Mispronounce your legislators' name
- Be unprepared
- Be vague, ambiguous or deceptive
- Be pushy or discourteous
- Use terms or abbreviations that may be unfamiliar (i.e. acronyms)
- Forget to provide personal and local examples
- Assume your legislator is an expert on your issue
- Mislead
- Overwhelm with too much information
- Get distracted
- Forget to ask for a commitment, when appropriate
- Threaten or overstate your case
- Be inflexible
- Be long-winded
- Get discouraged
- Remind them that you are a taxpayer
- Overstay your welcome
- Forget to follow up with a "thank you" letter
- Forget to send information along with letter, if requested



## IMPORTANCE OF LEGISLATIVE STAFF

Get to know the legislative staff

Staff are trusted source of information for Legislators

They gather information and brief members on issues

Staff serve as “eyes and ears” of the legislative member

Legislators rely on staff judgment

Staff have direct access to member

They can influence a members decision with new information



*Do:*

- Know the staff's title (i.e. Chief of staff, Committee staff, Legislative Aid, etc...)
- Make sure staff have your names, addresses and telephone numbers
- Impress the staff
- Get the staff's business cards
- Ask staff if they have been hearing from the opponents
- Ask staff if they have enough information to advise member
- Ask staff if the legislator needs to hear from more constituents



*Don't:*

- Ignore staff
- Dismiss the importance of staff
- Underestimate the power of staff

## TESTIFYING IN COMMITTEE

*Do:*

- Plan and prepare
- Know committee rules and protocol. Ask if you don't know
- If possible, coordinate testimony with others who share your point of view and will be testifying
- Arrive early and plan on staying late
- State your position clearly
- Know your audience
- Prepare and practice testimony
- Keep testimony short
- Try to anticipate questions that may be asked and be prepared
- Answer any committee questions honestly
- Say "thank you"

*Don't:*

- Wing it
- Be long winded
- Waste time describing your qualifications or background in great detail
- Read lengthy written statements verbatim
- Don't repeat points
- Become argumentative, upset or drawn into a shouting match
- Interrupt, make insulting comments or threaten

## HOW TO WRITE A LETTER



*Do:*

- Properly address letter or e-mail (see sample)
- Be sincere
- Make it personal and make the connection to the local community
- Be courteous and reasonable in tone
- Keep it brief-one subject or one bill
- If writing about a bill, state the bill number
- State specifically what action you want
- List reasons
- Make sure it is factually correct
- Raise questions and encourage a response, if appropriate
- Ask for support
- Seek a commitment
- Use your own words
- Be concise
- Make it legible
- Send on stationery
- Indicate awareness of the legislators past actions on related issues, if appropriate
- Include supporting information that reinforce your position-articles/editorials
- Check spelling
- Say “thank you”



*Don't:*

- Be rude
- Threaten
- Write the letter when you are angry
- Use a form letter. A personal letter is better
- Fail to clearly state your position
- Use philosophical arguments
- Address with incorrect titles
- Forget your audience
- Wait till the last minute
- Oversell your position
- Write lengthy and incoherent letters
- Just complain
- Issue an ultimatum
- Be poisonous. OK to be passionate
- Forget to include your name and contact information
- Remind the legislator that you are a taxpayer and a citizen
- Write illegibly
- Be sarcastic
- Insult
- Say “vote against this bill or else I won’t vote for you”
- Forget to say “thank you”
- Limit your letter to one legislator

# SAMPLE LETTER

Date

The Honorable (Legislator's Name)  
California State Assembly  
State Capitol  
Room 1234  
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: AB \_\_\_\_\_ Support

Dear Assembly member (Legislator's Name):

I am writing to you in support of AB\_\_\_\_\_.

This bill would (Explain) and why it is important to the member's district. (Present in a clear and concise manner)

We respectfully urge your support of AB\_\_\_\_\_. If you have any questions or need additional information please feel free to contact me.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

(Your Name)  
(Address)

Make sure letters are properly addressed:

The Honorable Jack Doe  
California State Senate  
State Capitol  
Room 1234  
Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Jill Roe  
California State Assembly  
State Capitol  
Room 5678  
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Senator Doe:

Dear Assembly member Roe:

## OTHER WAYS TO MAKE YOUR VOICE HEARD

- ★ Letters to the local newspaper editor
- ★ Opinion Piece (op ed page)
- ★ Talk to reporters or editor
- ★ Radio-call in shows
- ★ Media-News Conferences
- ★ Organize and participate in Rallies, etc
- ★ Protests, with proper permits of course
- ★ Collect petitions and organize letter-writing campaign from constituents
- ★ Distribute action materials
- ★ Join an Association or Organization
- ★ Get active with Associations and Organizations
- ★ Build broad and diverse Coalitions
- ★ Reach out to other Groups that have similar views
- ★ Join forces with others that have same position



## HOW A BILL BECOMES LAW

- Ideas for legislation comes from all kinds of sources
- Citizens, organizations and groups bring the ideas to the Legislator
- The Legislator agrees to carry the bill and is called the “author”
- The individual or group that came up with the idea is called the “sponsor”
- The language of the bill is drafted by Legislative Counsel
- The bill is introduced and is in print
- After introduction, the bill is assigned to the Rules Committees in the House of Origin and then referred to the Policy Committee for public hearing and discussion of merits
- The House of Origin means the house where the bill was first introduced.
- If the bill passes the Policy Committee, then it is referred to the Appropriations Committee, if it involves a cost to the State (fiscal impact), for another public hearing
- Both policy and appropriation committee hearings are open to the public and are an opportunity to express your views on the bill
- If passage is successful, the bill goes to the Floor and voted upon by the house
- If the bill passes the first house, it would go to the other house and through the same committee process
- If successful, the bill goes to the Governor for his decision (i.e. sign or veto)
- The bill becomes law on January 1 of the following year or immediately if the bill contains an urgency clause

## PROFESSIONAL BIOGRAPHY

JACK T. MOLODANOF is the President of Molodanof Government Relations. Mr. Molodanof is a state registered lobbyist, has distinguished himself in the area of legislative, regulatory and public service. He is a highly respected and trusted advisor to many local and state government officials.

Mr. Molodanof has been specializing in government relations, advocacy, political and regulatory issues for over twenty years. Mr. Molodanof represents individuals and businesses before local and state government agencies, as well as serving as government affairs advisor to numerous public entity clients and trade associations.

Mr. Molodanof is uniquely qualified to represent clients before various governmental and regulatory bodies. He has a thorough understanding of government and has an ability to find solutions to often-complex problems. Mr. Molodanof has been involved in many extensive local and state lobbying efforts dealing with numerous complex issues such as: banking, consumer protection, land use, environmental quality, education, energy, insurance, transportation, labor, judiciary, public safety, water, taxation, finance and state budget appropriations.

Need more help? Molodanof Government Relations will assess your government relation needs, develop strategy to accomplish your goals and assist in guiding you through the legislative process.

Mr. Molodanof is also available to speak at your legislative events, including your organization's Legislative Day.

For additional information please contact us at:

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