



How to Contact Lawmakers (Revision date 1-12-2013)

To be persuasive we must be believable. In order to be believable, then we must be credible. If we are to be credible, we must not only be truthful, but we need to be factual rather than emotional.

When you want to convert someone to your view, you go over to where he is standing, take him by the hand (mentally speaking), and guide him. You don't stand across the room and shout at him. You don't resort to name calling. You don't "order" him to come over to where you are. Rather, you start where he is and work from that position. That is the only way to get them to budge.

When talking to your lawmaker, see if you can come up with a better idea. The El Cortez Hotel in San Diego is the birthplace of an architectural first, and a great example to follow.

The management at this elegant hotel determined their single elevator was not sufficient for getting their guests to and from their rooms and the lobby. Deciding an additional elevator was needed, engineers and architecture experts were contracted to solve the problem.

They proposed cutting a hole in each floor from the basement to the top of the hotel. As the experts stood in the lobby discussing their plans, a hotel janitor overheard their conversation.

"What are you up to?" he asked.

One of the planners explained the situation and their proposed solution. The janitor responded, "That's going to make quite a mess with plaster dust and debris everywhere."

One of the engineers assured him it would work fine because they were planning to close the hotel while the work was being completed.

"That's going to cost the hotel a healthy amount of money, and there will be a lot of people out of jobs until the project is completed" replied the janitor.

One of the architects asked him if he had a better idea.

Leaning on his mop, he thought for a moment and then suggested, "Well, why don't you build the elevator on the outside of the hotel?"

Looking at each other in amazement, the architects and engineers responded with, "That's never been done before...let's do it."

Hence, the El Cortez Hotel became the originator of a popular architectural feature.



The moral of the story is this: It doesn't take a trained expert to come up with the best idea.

As with the janitor who thoughtfully pondered the situation and came up with an alternative plan, it is beneficial if you not only explain why you feel the way you do, but also have an alternative plan. Then, you can answer the question for him/her, "What's in it for him?"

Will your lawmaker suffer loss if he/she does the opposite result of that you want? How do you make them see the benefit to follow your plan?

Writing a Letter

The primary value of a personal letter is that it enables you to convey a truly personal feeling and reach a special place in the mind of the reader. You can relate specific thoughts in personal letters that are simply not practical using other mediums.

- Here is how you would write to the President:
 - President
 - The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

 - Dear President

- Here is how you would write to your Representative in Congress and two U.S. Senators:
 - The Honorable (full name)
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

 - Dear Representative (last name):

 - The Honorable (full name)
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

 - Dear Senator (last name):

When writing a letter, keep it to one page. Be sure to convey all the information you feel you must convey, but be as brief as possible.

Keep each letter to one topic. If you have multiple concerns, address each one separately in separate letters.



If you want to be like the janitor, be sure that you present the facts that disturb you. Make sure that you are accurate in your assessment. Remember, you want to be believable, credible and truthful. Then state your proposal.

Be professional in your writing following simple letter writing protocol. Make your paragraphs short – five or six lines each. Do not overuse underlining or capital letters. If you use a P.S., make sure that your reader is challenged to take action on your suggestion or concern. When you are finished with your letter, use the word, “Sincerely”, four spaces and then type your name. Sign your name in the space you just made.

SPELL CHECK. Then reread your letter and check for grammar and spelling errors.

Personally sign your letter using a different color of ink than it is typed in. Why? It shows that it isn't a stamp and that you personally took the time to not only write your letter, but to sign it as well.

Sending an E-mail

The real art of communication is not only to say the right thing in the right place but to leave unsaid the wrong things at the tempting moments. Good communication is as stimulating as black coffee and as hard to sleep after.

You want to be profound (like our janitor) so think before you type! In other words, don't ever send an e-mail to your representative that is coming from your emotions and not backed up with facts.

Ronald Reagan said about the Soviet Union that he would “Trust and verify”. We need to do the same with the information that we receive from the internet. Too often, we get an e-mail that sounds frightening and needing a response from us – immediately. Just as a host of information on the web distorts those of us on the right, so there is information that will be sent to you that will be distorted or incorrect. Before you send an e-mail about any concern that you have, check it out first. The first time you send out an erroneous e-mail is the last time you have credibility.

When sending an e-mail you will need to go to your Representative's or Congressman's site and find the word “contact” or “e-mail”. When you click on that you will have to give some personal information before getting to the place where you can get to the message box. If you don't want to provide this information, then perhaps you should write a letter or make a phone call.

When writing your e-mail message, keep to the rules for letter writing. Keep it factual, brief and grammatically correct. Keep it to one topic. Do not enter into the name calling arena.

Present your concern and then a solution. Ask for a response.



Making a Phone Call

When making a personal call to your representatives, keep in mind that you will be talking to an aide. Get the name of the aide and then address them by name. Let them know that you want your information to be communicated to your Legislator.

Prior to making your phone call, be sure that you are armed with your facts. You may want to write down some “bullet” points to keep you on track.

Be sure that your voice and conversation is calm but confident. Talk clearly. Use short sentences. Talk loudly without shouting and not directly into the mouthpiece for the most effective transmission.

Your voice should project authority. State your message as concisely as possible. Whatever you do, don't read your statement of concern, talk as though you were carrying on a conversation with a business associate.

When making phone calls, keep a log and keep track of who you've called, the date, topic and their response.

If you're calling outside your voting area, let them know that you are aware that you are out of their district and can't vote for or against them. However, you can, and will, support their opponent with your time, talent and treasure if you are at odds with his or her policy points of views.

Making a Personal Visit

If you want to make an appointment with your representative, simply call their office and ask to do so. You may have to wait but you should be able to get a time where he/she will meet with you. It's always best if you call for that appointment time rather than trying a “walk in” time. You rarely, if ever, get personal contact by walking in.

In order to be credible when meeting with your Representative, be sure to go there informed with facts and not emotion. This will keep you from “rambling” or going off on rabbit trails that dilute your main message and prevent you from making your point. Passion is one thing, becoming emotional is another. You need to stay calm and focused.

Some key things to be aware of would be, first, to be on time. Nothing destroys credibility more than being late for a meeting. When you meet, reach out to shake his/her hand, look them in the eye and give a firm handshake and give a pleasant greeting. You may want to say, “I've been looking forward to speaking with you, thank you for meeting with me”.

Dress appropriately, namely, casual office attire. Patriotic T-shirts are great for rallies and meetings but not so when you go to meet your Representative.



Remember, you will have more impact with your knowledge of the issues than making a statement with a slogan on a T-shirt. First impressions are lasting and it is hard to overcome a bad first impression. Make yours professional and respectful.

While sitting face to face, be sure to present your solution to the problem that you are concerned about.