

Being A Legislative Advocate (#1)

Dear Instructor,

This segment will review the expectations of advocates. That is, what are common expectations for someone preparing to represent either themselves or an organization in front of legislators? Three core principles hold true, regardless of whether they are testifying on a bill, or going to an office meeting.

Introduction

Ask your group about their advocacy experience. Have they met with a Legislator, gone to a Grassroots Day event, or other type of day of advocacy? Let them briefly share their experiences. Then discuss the importance of advocacy. Our system was created when advocates convinced a legislator to write “the Lanterman Act.” Nowadays, advocates push the Legislature and Governor to provide more funding for our system, to change and improve how it works, and to keep the promise of the Lanterman Act.

Be Prepared

Students should be briefed on the importance of preparing for meetings. This includes not only knowing the story they intend to share, or the specific issue request they may make, but best practices, including:

- Having talking points writing up before the meeting
- Specifically saying, during the meeting, that they are a constituent
- Arriving on time, or a little early
- Not saying negative things about legislators or political parties – remain focused on the issue!

Classroom Discussion Topics: How does being prepared help you succeed in general? What techniques do you use to prepare for meetings or public speaking events?

Dress The Part

These meetings are formal events with elected officials and their staff. There is no formal dress code, but students should be encouraged to represent themselves and (where relevant) their organizations as well as possible. “Church clothes” or “office clothes” can be good examples. Manners are also important. Being polite and respectful, even when disagreeing, is an important part of professionalism.

Classroom Discussion Topics: Do you dress or speak differently at different events? Have you ever been to a meeting with a legislator? What was your interaction like? Why does it matter what clothes you wear, or the way you speak, to different people?

Know Your Team

Some of your students may attend meetings on their own behalf, representing nobody but themselves. But others will be speaking on behalf of an organization, either alone or as part of a team. Discuss how you learn what an organization’s views are, and how you represent them. Note the importance of making sure you can use personal examples to support the view of the organization.

Classroom Discussion Topics: Have you ever been part of a group that met with a legislator? What was your role? Have you had to share the opinion of a group? How do you make sure you are sharing that opinion, and not your own? Why is this important?

Being A Legislative Advocate

STUDENT MATERIAL

Are you ready to be an expert on issues your elected officials are talking about? The most effective advocates know their topics inside and out. But there are other expectations...



Be Prepared!

Effective advocates know what they will be talking about. Before you go, write out what you want to say. Practice

saying it! Ask for help if you need assistance. If you are travelling, be sure you're packed (this means your ID, luggage, travel plans, medication, and other items). Take time to prepare, and ask for help if you need it.



Dress The Part!

Professional advocates wear suits, dresses, skirts/blouses, or other formal clothes. While public advocates are not required to dress up, you should

do your best to! Wear your church clothes, or what you wear if you work in an office.



Know Your Team!

It's not just about the folks you work with. Your team is also the organization you are

representing. Sometimes, you represent your friends or people you work with. This means you have to make sure your words and actions represent you **and** your organization positively! Are you able to be a part of your team?

INSTRUCTOR NOTES

Participants should learn that their role as advocates comes with obligations. Major points are preparation, professionalism, and publicly representing an organization.

Be Prepared

Discuss the importance of doing the work before the event. Is your story ready? What kind of practice have you done? Are your travel plans set? What specific plans or steps do you need to take when you travel?

Dress The Part

Advocates should strive to meet an (informal) dress code. Stress the importance of first impressions. A good guideline is to treat this like a job interview, wedding, or formal religious service. Dress and groom accordingly.

Know Your Team

For lessons that go beyond individual advocacy, speakers are presenting their own story to represent a larger group. This means their actions/words reflect on it. Discuss how this type of advocacy means sharing personal stories, while also making sure to advocate on behalf of the group. It's not about the person *individually*, but their story is a vital part of the bigger picture.

Reasonable Resources

You may wish to speak to your organization's human resources specialist to learn more about these topics. Instructors can draw on their experience-based expertise in understanding public speaking best practices, as well as communications for an organization.