

Hello and welcome to Rules for Effective Lobbying, a ten-part Advocacy in Practice mini-series. I'm Ray LeBov. I've worked in and around California's capitol for more than 40 years, first in the Legislature as committee counsel for 17 years, and then as a lobbyist for the past 25 years. I also created and run the Capitol Seminars legislative advocacy training program which is hosted at the McGeorge School of Law in Sacramento, California.

Today I will be discussing one my rules for effective lobbying that I learned from personal experience. Today's rule that we'll be looking at is: be a sponge.

My first job out of law school was working in the Legislature. When I arrived in Sacramento, I felt as I had been deposited here from another planet. Everything regarding the Capitol was different from anything that I, and I dare say anyone else, had ever experienced. In fact, that has been demonstrated by conversations and observations made by former local elected officials who have come to Sacramento as newly elected legislators and who assumed that there would be strong similarities in the way business was conducted, but soon learned otherwise.

Some of the unique aspects of the way things run in Sacramento include communication styles and networks, ethos, rules, rhythms and cycles, and much, much more. I made the best decision of my professional career, one that has stood me in great stead all these years, and that was to be a sponge. By that I mean, observe whose succeeding and why, and whose failing and why, and then incorporating that into my approach to my responsibilities.

Let me give a few examples. One is in committee hearings when a person is testifying, talking past the point of effectiveness. That is, not knowing when to stop. I've seen this happen multiple occasions, where someone had the votes to get their bill out of committee, kept talking, and lost the number of votes they needed to get the bill out, where a member of the committee would say, "I'm sorry, Mr. Johnson. You had me five minutes ago but based on what you just said, I can't possibly vote for your bill."

When I worked for the Assembly Judiciary Committee, we had a chair of the committee who, when he wanted save someone from doing that to themselves, he would say, "Mr. Smith, do you want your bill, or do you want to talk?"

A couple other examples. One is the importance of patience and timing - also known as not giving in to your action bias or not confusing motion with action. It's not just important to do the right thing. It's important to do the right thing at the right time. Doing things in the wrong order or at the wrong time can be very costly.

One more, I would like to mention is, picking the right legislator to ask to be the author of your sponsored bill. To me, this is probably the most critical and complex decision that a lobbyist has to make, and the results speak for themselves. Those who pay the requisite attention to this task generally will succeed. Those who don't almost guarantee their failure.

That's all for this episode of Rules of Effective Lobbying. Tune in next time. Until then, I'm Ray LeBov, and thanks for tuning in.