

The 7 Deadly Sins of Advocacy Day

Advocacy Days at the California State Capitol are intense and busy. How can you rise above the crowd and get the meetings you need? Avoiding the following “sins” is an important first step!

Sin #1 – Non-Constituency

You'll waste a lot of time if you don't focus on constituency-based meetings. Legislators and staff rarely meet with anyone outside their district, particularly when they receive dozens of requests per day. Make sure your meeting is with the appropriate legislative office.

Sin #2 – Non-Written Requests

You'll generally be asked to submit your initial request via e-mail, web form or fax. To find out the best method, check the contact tab on the Legislator's website or contact the [CPA](#).

Sin #3 – Assumption

If you schedule your own meeting, never assume that your request actually made it to the office or that the scheduler will magically get back to you. When you call to follow-up, be sure to say, “I'm calling regarding a scheduling request I already sent in.” That way you can avoid an unnecessary discussion about how to send in a request. Also, be sure to make a note about when they'll be able to look at your request. It's a waste of your time and theirs to call them every week if they've already told you they won't be able to consider the request until the week before the event (which is common).

Sin #4 – Member-itis

Recognize that legislative staff is important in the meeting process. Never, ever insist on meeting only with the member, unless you're willing to give up the meeting altogether. Getting legislator meetings 20 to 25 percent of the time is an outstanding percentage for any group. If you're offered a meeting with a staff person, treat that individual with the same respect you'd afford the legislator.

Sin #5 – Inflexibility

Inflexibility is a problem particularly when it's combined with high expectations. Too many groups offer a very small meeting window and then, are irritated when staff or members are not available in the specific time slot they've designated for meetings. Try to have an entire day available.

Sin #6 – Training only on Policy, not Process

You want to walk into an office with confidence and state precisely what we are asking – by bill number and appropriation amount. Don't be intimidated by this information or concerned about forgetting it. You can work from notes until you are comfortable with details. Your conversation should include delivering the message, making the constituency connection, and telling a personal story. You don't have to have all the answers. It's perfectly acceptable to say, “I don't know, but I'll get back to you”.

Sin #7 – Abandonment

Once your lobby day is over, your advocacy for the year isn't finished. In fact, it's just begun. Try to work with the offices you contacted on an ongoing basis. Also, communicate your experience to [Randall Hagar](#), CPA's Director of Government Relations, so that he can build on your work. In addition, extend your advocacy to local elected officials and forums relevant to your advocacy goals and interests.