

McKeon Group Presents

5 QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF BEFORE PRESENTING A PROPOSAL TO CONGRESS

How to effectively be heard on
the Hill

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Do I Have the Right Connection?

As a member of Congress, hundreds, if not thousands, of proposals crossed my desk during my time in office. On average, a member of the House represents 700,000 constituents - which means Congress and their staff are filtering through approximately 250 proposals every year.

Therefore the need to break through the noise and stand out is paramount to getting heard. It's simply the first challenge, a major one at that, to be overcome when submitting an idea to the state or federal government.

After 22 years in office, I recommend asking yourself five specific questions before presenting a proposal.

The first question to ask is: Do I Have the Right Connection?

Building a better mousetrap is rendered fruitless unless the right people review your idea. Knowing who to talk to and getting your proposal in front of their eyes is the first obstacle. This is one of the most difficult steps in the entire proposal process. After all, there's no point in spending the time and energy crafting a meaningful proposal if it's never read by those you intended it for - those who can turn it into something actionable.

If you don't maintain a relationship with the relevant leadership, you'll need to:

Enlist the help of a contact who has that connection

Develop the relationship yourself by going to town hall meetings, fundraisers, or other events your target Representative attends

Visit the district office and engage the staff with the goal of setting up a meeting

Find a consulting firm who already has those contacts

Connections and influence could be a deciding factor when it comes to the success of your proposal. If you are serious about your idea, get in touch with the people that can help you see it through.

2

Is My Message Precise?

Over the past few years, I have had the opportunity to help our clients draft their proposals to our nation's leaders. I have often found these presentations to be long-winded and have advised clients to make sure their proposals get right to the point. Here is why: a lengthy proposal can inhibit any further progress.

The second question to ask yourself is: Is My Message Precise?

From the first word you put down, you have 60 seconds to capture interest or your words will be filed away and most likely never acted upon. So get to the point immediately. If your proposal takes an exhaustive amount of time to paint the picture, your audience will never embrace it.

Be precise, stay on point, and deliver a concise, digestible overview. There's simply no time for a college-level lecture - explain your idea in terms that can be easily understood.

And, avoid using a PowerPoint presentation or any other type of comprehensive material for any initial meeting. Those are better suited for leave behind pieces when you have the opportunity for a more in-depth discussion with the staff. After all, you should know the material and key points well enough that a full-length presentation isn't necessary.

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Have I rehearsed and revised enough?

After setting up a meeting, you must be prepared to present and grab attention immediately.

When creating a presentation, be sure that it is organized and maintains a logical flow. If you fail to do that, your message will get lost and any headway you have made will be hindered.

The third question to ask yourself is: Have I rehearsed and revised enough?

Odds are you won't have more than a few minutes to present your idea, so rehearse and revise the presentation with a focus on delivering the most valuable details in the shortest amount of time. When I would hold proposal meetings, they were scheduled to last fifteen minutes. This fostered the delivery of clear, concise proposals.

Practice your presentation several times, both in private and in front of someone else. Omit any unnecessary detail. Make sure your message is clear and defined. If you are not prepared, it will immediately show. Practicing your pitch will also help you remain succinct. You only have a few minutes to set the stage and you want to leave some time for discussion if applicable.

Your opening sentence is crucial to success. If it doesn't pique interest, losing the attention of the room is inevitable. Clearly state your message from the start, with enthusiasm and purpose. Quickly identify or relate the problem. Follow that up with your resolution or strategic plan to resolve the issue. Make sure to then highlight what success will look like when the matter has been settled.

It is also important to know your audience. Is the Member attending? Will the Chief of Staff or Legislative Director going to be there? Are additional staff members going to be present and/or professional committee staff? This will help you focus your presentation and align priorities.

Vigorous preparation will help you see success.

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Do I Really Believe in What I am Presenting?

You've made your "connection". You have a precise message you need to get across. You've practiced and rehearsed your proposal. Now, it's time to finally perform. Getting to this point is no small feat; however, you can't falter now. This is the step that can ultimately determine whether your proposal will come to fruition or take a step backwards.

The fourth question to ask yourself is: Do I Really Believe in What I am Presenting?

Be completely engaged. You need to believe in what you are presenting. It's not enough to just "sell" it. If you aren't excited about your idea, no one else will be either.

A few years ago, a man approached me on an airplane with an innovative idea regarding U.S. Defense. He knew who I was and decided to use this opportunity to make a connection. He was confident, knowledgeable and truly believed in his idea. Because he was prepared, insightful, and authentic in sharing his idea with me, I ultimately took his request to the committee. Shortly after that, he was invited to present in front of that particular committee in Washington D.C.

Just to give you a little background on this gentleman: he did not come from one of the big defense contractors. He didn't have the "name recognition" some believe is necessary in order to be heard by Congress. Instead, he was simply passionate and professional in his delivery, both on the airplane with me and in his proposal to the committee. His proposal was ultimately accepted.

This success story is an excellent example of what can happen if you follow all of the prior steps up to this point. However, I've seen the other side of the above situation too. People finally get their shot to present in front of a committee and waste the opportunity. I've seen people turn into robots during their presentation, or they mumble statements and veer off topic.

Just to reiterate this point one more time - thousands of proposals are sent to members of Congress. Hundreds of meetings are held. You have to stand out during your presentation. When you practice your pitch, make sure your authentic belief of what you are presenting shines through.

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Am I Respectful of Their Time?

I had the opportunity to serve the 25th District of California in the U.S. House of Representatives for 22 years. During that time, I served as Chairman on both the House Armed Services Committee and the House Education and the Workforce Committee. I've sat through countless presentations, and this final word of advice is crucial in delivering a successful pitch.

The fifth and final question to ask yourself is: Am I Respectful of Their Time?

While responding to the needs of constituents is the first priority for any elected government official, there are thousands of people clamoring to be heard at any given moment.

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