

Building Relationships With Lawmakers

By Will Rogers, Director of Governmental Affairs

*“The salvation of the state lies in the watchfulness of its citizens.”
North Portal, Nebraska State Capitol*



Will Rogers

Can you name your U.S. congressman or senators? How about your county supervisor or state representative? What about your city council member or even a member of your local school board? These are important questions to ask when determining what kind of relationship you have with your elected officials.

However, your most important question should be, “do your elected officials know your name?” An easy test to find out whether or not you have an effective relationship with your lawmaker is to ask yourself, “If I picked up the phone right now and called my congressman or senator, would he or she take my call?” If your answer is “no” or “maybe,” then you probably don’t have the kind of relationship you need with elected officials.

Four Quick Rules for Building a Relationship with Your Elected Officials

1. *Get to Know Your Elected*

Officials on a First Name Basis

From your city and county, to state and federal lawmakers, you should strive to develop the kind of relationship with your elected official that puts you both on a first name basis. This will require you to meet face-to-face with your lawmakers, and to discover who they are and why they ran for office in the first place. Ask them about where they grew up, went to school, whether they are married, and if so, whether they have any children. Talk about what they did professionally prior to being elected to office. And certainly do not hesitate to talk about yourself and mention any shared or common interests you both might have. Meeting your elected official may be as easy as attending a city council meeting or visiting their

place of business. However, for higher offices, you may have to visit their office at the state capitol or even Washington D.C.

2. *Building Trust with Elected Officials*

Developing a friendship with any one typically requires a certain level of trust. Not only can this take time, it also requires you to be trustworthy. If you make a promise to an elected official and don’t keep it, they will not soon forget about it. If they ask a question, it is better to answer truthfully rather than giving the answer you think they want to hear. Even if they don’t like what you have to say, they will recognize that you are willing to be forthcoming with the truth, and will consider you a trusted source of information.

3. *Offer to Educate your Elected Officials (You Know More Than You Think)*

Don’t be shy. Invite your elected officials to your place of business and speak with them about the challenges of running your business. Walk them through your entire business and invite them to shake hands with every one of your employees. Make sure they understand what your business does and how it has become a vital part of the local and state economy. Explain how they can help your industry grow through the legislative process.

4. *Give Time and Money*

Volunteering requires time you may not have. Campaign contributions require money. However, if you don’t contribute to your elected officials, you won’t have

the same access that others have to your lawmakers. One excellent way to get to know your elected officials is to host a fundraiser for their re-election. Such events require coordination with the elected official or their representatives and are much appreciated. In addition, when you host a fundraiser you not only give your time and money, you introduce the elected official to your friends and acquaintances – other potential supporters with whom they can develop a relationship.

If you follow these simple rules, you will be able to develop the kind of relationship where you won’t have to cross the street to greet your lawmaker – they will cross the street to greet you instead. ■

Four Rules for Building a Relationship with Your Elected Officials

- ✓ **Get to Know Your Elected Officials on a First Name Basis**
- ✓ **Build Trust with Elected Officials**
- ✓ **Offer to Educate your Elected Officials**
- ✓ **Give Time and Money**