

## Tips for Getting Members Engaged in Your Advocacy Efforts

Following our State Legislative Directors' meeting last month, I asked three of your colleagues to share some tips on what they have found to work in engaging their fellow members in their state's advocacy efforts. Below are the un-redacted versions of their suggestions.

### Juanita Phillips, Federal State Legislative Director, Alabama SHRM

My tips would be:

1. **Build strong relationships.** Network among the chapter leaders, legislative directors, state council members, etc. throughout your state. Visit local chapters. Just like our A-Team work is built on the foundation of relationships with Members of Congress and their staff, what we are able to accomplish is also built on the relationships we have built among our fellow professionals and SHRM members, and on our networking efforts throughout the state.
2. **Get started.** You can talk about it and think about all you want, but you have to get started. Starting small is okay. Over time, your efforts will build upon past accomplishments, and then individual achievements will propel your program exponentially.
3. **Communicate often, clearly, and excitedly!** Word should get back to each chapter in a face-to-face manner regarding legislative activity, issues, events, and achievements. As a state leader, touch base with your network in the most appropriate way and frequency - not so often that you aggravate recipients and no one reads your e-mails, but enough to keep them engaged. Share how legislative involvement can impact individual careers, companies, chapters, the state, SHRM and our profession, and really the whole country - in that helping people grasp that being active legislatively can help us create more great places to work, and doing so makes the whole country better. Be positive, excited, and a believer that we can make a difference.

### Michael Kalt, State Legislative Director, California SHRM

My tips are as follows (and would echo some of what Juanita mentioned);

- (1) **Develop relationships and your network.** As in life, "you aren't in this all by yourself," so take advantage of the energy and insights others can provide to your efforts. SHRM has a wealth of resources and talent, and an established advocacy effort so there is no need to recreate the wheel. Leaders throughout your Council and the Chapters are a great resource and have institutional memory, and have shown devotion to the HR profession, so are a natural source of information, plus there are undoubtedly many talented HR professionals interested in advocacy, but are just looking for someone to lead the effort.

(2) **Find (and maintain) your voice.** While developing relationships with other like-minded groups (e.g., the Chamber, the Restaurant Association, the Small Business Groups) is important and can assist with labor-intensive projects, if you do not remember what it is that makes you unique, you risk being lumped in with these other groups. HR professionals are correctly viewed as "wearing both hats" and balancing the interests of employees and employers, and have a special expertise that most legislators lack, and the "employee" and the "employer" groups do not provide when focusing on "their" bills. When taking positions on particular items, speak from the Human Resources' perspective and perhaps focus on smaller portions of a bill, even if other groups are focusing on larger or different issues regarding that item. For example, during a recent debate about a Paid Sick Leave bill, rather than simply arguing the new document retention periods would be "burdensome" (a point business groups were making), we argued that the proposed retention periods would conflict with other applicable retention periods HR professionals deal with. This more focused approach built up our credibility with the bill's author who had not realized these other periods already existed, and allowed us to showcase our expertise.

(3) **Be realistic, but persistent.** As you begin or develop your advocacy efforts, remember that you need to walk before you can run, and keep in mind how you decide which vendors or partners to use. By that, if you attempt to do too much too quickly, you are likely to discourage yourself and your team members, particularly since legislators or other advocacy groups are not likely to entrust too much responsibility to a group they are not familiar with. So consider identifying reasonable metrics (i.e., perhaps two advocacy items in one year, three in the second, and four in the third) that are both reasonable but reflect growth to keep the enthusiasm going. For those items you select, be persistent to show your commitment, including perhaps office meetings and submitting letters and offering testimony on those items. This focus and follow-through avoids wasted effort but shows that you are committed to your particular projects, which will pay off in future years when other groups or legislators are thinking about who they might want to partner with on other employment items.

## Cindy Butler, State Legislative Director – Rhode Island SHRM

As far as how to engage members, I guess this is what has worked in RI:

1) **Engage a core group of colleagues who have an interest/passion in employment and labor law and want to be part of making a difference.** Their energy and enthusiasm will engage others. I find that HR professionals are often reluctant to "step out of their comfort zone" into the advocacy role; however when they see others getting involved, they are more likely to try it.

2) **Find out what your HR colleague is interested in.** Offer them opportunities to get involved in issues that are important to them/their organization. Over time, as they build confidence in the advocacy role, they will be more comfortable stepping outside of their comfort zone.

3) **Mentor junior colleagues--take the time to coach and develop.** This will be as rewarding for the person mentoring as the mentee. Remember what it was like when you first got involved. It can be intimidating.

Offer them roles where they can be successful. Small successes build confidence. Recognize (publicly and privately) their successes. If folks see that legislators are listening--they become more confident in

their ability to influence and make a difference. (And they will eventually believe what SHRM keeps telling them--as an HR professional you know much more about how the issues impact the workplace than they do!)

4) ***Frequent communication; calls, meetings, emails, etc.*** I often forward new articles, SHRM notices, information about our legislators, etc. It keeps people informed and they can engage as it works for their schedule. I am surprised sometimes about the reaction of certain information and the conversations that take place as a result. People like to express their opinions in a "safe environment" and they appreciate the opportunity to learn from their colleagues.