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ROOTS OF SUCCESS
The Resource for Grassroots and PAC Productivity
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From Resistance to Resources: How to Gain Internal Support, Status and Money for Your Grassroots and PAC Programs—Part Two

Why do some government affairs departments, specifically grassroots and PAC operations, consistently get increased budget funding and staff resources while others struggle to justify their existence? We track our client's results, and what we found was startling.

After the conclusion of our collaborations, over 85 percent of our consulting clients have experienced long-term funding increases, increased staff resources, and enhanced internal status for the grassroots program and/or PAC. We refer to them as our "85% Club." So, in hot pursuit of the truth, I wanted to find out what some of these organizations have in common.

In Part 1 of this article, we found that they all practice the following:

- Intrepid accountability
- "The first sale is to yourself"
- An internal marketing strategy
- Attention to the launch

I wish I could gleefully report that we could push the proverbial "easy button" to secure permanent increases in resources and staff support. Alas, there isn't one. In addition to the above factors, we found even more success indicators among our "85% Club" members.

Securing Internal Champions

Most of us are aware of the cardinal rule of grassroots and PAC (and any government relations initiative, for that matter) existence: senior management support is critical for program success. The mistake is being content with that, rather than cultivating an "insurance plan" via more internal champions. We need support at the top, the grassroots, and the magnificent middle. Thus, we must secure internal champions beyond the executive suite to champion our program.

From Resistance to Resources

The influence rule of similarity applies to this success factor. The CEO and/or Board members must help promote our efforts, but people need to see someone *similar* to them also supporting us. The closer in work assignment, appearance, and socio-economic status, the more influential. Several of our most successful PAC clients have deftly taken the time to map out a strategy for finding internal champions, and equipping them with talking points and supporting materials to promote the PAC. They *made time* for this, they didn't scramble to find internal champions when it was "convenient." We collaborated with one of them on an internal marketing plan. There was no doubt as to who we were recruiting to help and what we were asking them to do.

We encourage our clients to be brutally specific as to what they need from their champions. We want them to define what "support" means. What are the *exact behaviors* desired? I learned the importance of this through trial and terror.

When our new CEO took the helm at Nationwide Insurance, he approached me after a grassroots recognition event and asked, "What do you want me to do for the Civic Action Program?" I was giddy at the prospect of telling him what we needed. I enumerated what we wanted and followed that up with a memo to reinforce our request. He never let us down. We must make it painless for our champions to help us. Let's not make them guess at what the word "support" means. It's too late to pray when the devil comes. Credible, similar internal champions are critically important when it comes to scheduling grassroots and PAC recruitment meetings. It's too difficult to find champions after your first disappointing PAC meeting. Someone outside of government relations has to reinforce the importance of the meeting without making it mandatory. Your internal champions in the middle and upper middle management levels can do this.

Emphasis on Results Rather than Activity

One of my Fortune 100 corporate clients wanted to expand their broad-based and key contact grassroots network. However, rather than taking a numerical approach to measuring their success, they were more concerned about finding the *right* employees with the *right* legislator relationships.

They did not care if an employee was best friends with the chairman of the Agriculture Committee. They wanted people with contacts on the Ways and Means and Appropriations Committees, and that is where we focused our efforts.

Did it take longer and require more phone calls and research than simply taking a "WB" (Warm Body) approach? Yes, but now they have employees who are willing and able to *meet* with key Members of Congress.

In the desire to demonstrate any kind of activity, we can sometimes sacrifice meaningful results for "doing something." We often waste too much time in a scattergun approach to recruitment because we want to show that we have done something -- we want to show activity.

I find that a lot of non-profits with a fundraising focus fall into this trap. However, one of our non-profit clients is changing her grassroots culture from activity to results. After a presentation explaining this new philosophy, she secured three new staff members and a budget increase.

Provide Success Tools

To properly lead, we have to give our members the tools to follow. The most successful grassroots and PAC's do just that. I have never heard a grassroots advocate say that he or she "has enough information to know what to say to a legislator, when to say it, and how to say it." Similarly, I have never heard a new PAC recruiter say that they are confident in their ability to rebut common PAC objections.

One of our most successful association PAC clients brought their member institution representatives together for several conference calls where I guided them through the science of how people are persuaded to join a PAC. We asked them to create their own scripts and talking points to determine if we indeed gave them appropriate tools.

From Resistance to Resources (con't)

The result? A 70% increase in PAC revenue and their per-institution contributions increased by over 400%. They also reached their goal three months before any other association. The success tools helped accelerate their results.

Always remember that you have options -- while there are optimum settings for learning retention, think of other ways that you can provide tools to your members, whether it's CD's, web-based seminars, podcasting, manuals, etc.

Encourage Feedback

Stakeholder feedback is critical at all junctures of the political involvement journey, but it is vital when we are revitalizing our PAC or grassroots program. We find that our "85% Club" clients make an effort to get not only key volunteer input on initiatives, but also feedback from those outside the government relations galaxy. Several of the national non-profits who have hired us are most adept at this practice; thus, it may reflect a culture of inclusiveness. When it's time to implement the grassroots or PAC changes, it's hard for those who provided input to disavow their own work.

This practice coincides with one of the main findings in my *Fortune* ["Power 25" grassroots benchmarking research](#). One of the grassroots volunteer retention competencies they exhibit is to "regularly seek volunteer feedback." Several of the organizations even have their volunteers review staff documents and grassroots volunteer materials.

Another one of my non-profit clients regularly brings in stakeholders and members from throughout the country to rigorously examine new initiatives via surveys, feedback, small breakout groups, and lively discussion. This non-profit has been hailed by management guru Peter Drucker as "the most effectively managed non-profit in the country."

Reality Check

Ask yourself:

- Do we have a plan to secure internal champions with specific directives on how they should help internally market our PAC and/or grassroots?
- Do we focus on results or activity?
- Do we provide tools to help our members succeed?
- Do we encourage feedback, especially from our volunteers and those outside of the government relations department?
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Do you want your organization to be a member of the "85% Club?" Amy is offering TeleClasses and workshops on how to implement these success factors into your PAC and/or grassroots programs. Contact us at 513.762.7668 / amy@showaltergroup.com.

About The Showalter Group, Inc.

The Showalter Group works with associations and corporations that want to increase their grassroots and PAC productivity. We provide highly customized solutions via grassroots consultation, public affairs staff and volunteer training, coaching for public affairs staff, keynote presentations, and grassroots project management.

To book Amy Showalter to speak at your next meeting, or to inquire about our grassroots or PAC consulting services or other products, contact us at:

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The Innovate to Motivate Advantage

Mark Your Calendar! Innovate to Motivate 2006: January 31 — February 3, Key West, Florida -- www.innovatetomotivate.com

A message from the Innovate to Motivate Co-Chairs, Kristine Kilbride, Genworth Financial, and Bradley Smith, American Chemistry Council



In 2006, Innovate to Motivate will celebrate its 5th year. I am proud to say that I have “grown up” with Innovate to Motivate. For more than half the time I have been in the PAC and grassroots field, the annual conference has been here to help, not only with great ideas, but to keep me truly motivated.

There are two hallmarks of the annual Innovate to Motivate conference. It is the conference of choice for experienced practitioners, and all sessions are carefully designed to be highly interactive. This sharing of information from all conference participants is beneficial to both the experienced participants as well as the newcomers. What better way to learn than from hundreds of people sharing their successes and failures?

With the rules and regulations we must follow in doing our jobs, sometimes it seems difficult to think outside the box. We get stuck in ruts, but I always leave Innovate to Motivate with many nuggets that help to keep my job exciting and interesting.

This is a great opportunity to not only learn, but to socialize with many of the sharpest minds in PAC and grassroots. I have gained so much by just meeting others in the PAC and grassroots world. Many times I have contacted people I met at this conference to ask for ideas, opinions and advice. We are all in the same boat, but we all have different ways to paddle that boat to get us to our final destination. That is the greatest reason to attend Innovate to Motivate.

I look forward to seeing you in Key West!

Kristine Kilbride
Genworth Financial
2006 Innovate to Motivate Co-chair



At least once a week, I am faced with a situation in which I rely on the techniques, ideas and opinions learned during my four years attending the Innovate to Motivate conference. When I am faced with a situation that has not been discussed at the conference, I can call (or email) any of the many contacts I made and get the support I need.

Since the Innovate to Motivate conference attracts so many experienced PAC and grassroots professionals, I have no difficulty uncovering the best solutions – as well as the most common pitfalls to avoid.

Especially helpful are the informal interactions I have had with the co-hosts. Learning about new technologies developed by the co-hosts allows me to pursue new grassroots projects with the comfort of knowing that I am not doing it alone. Innovate to Motivate has worked hard to create an unusually comfortable environment for meeting PAC and grassroots service providers.

I view all aspects of the annual Innovate to Motivate conference to be beneficial to my employer, the American Chemical Society's members, and myself. I trust you will too.

I look forward to meeting you in Key West!

Bradley R. Smith
American Chemical Society
2006 Innovate to Motivate Co-chair