

## HOOK, LINE, AND SINKER: THE THREE PARTS OF A LEGISLATIVE MEETING

Legislative meetings are very brief—usually no more than fifteen minutes or so. That means you do not have a lot of time for idle chitchat. You’ve got to get right to your issues and your stories, and then make a clear request. Be mindful to reserve enough time to give the lawmaker a chance to respond to your stories and arguments, and most important, your request.

A good legislative meeting can usually be divided into three parts, which I refer to as hook, line, and sinker. Illustration 16.3 provide an example of how this works.

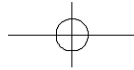
### Hook

*Hook* is who you are. When you sit down to meet with an elected official, the first thing that goes through her mind is the same question that goes through her mind when she opens an e-mail from you or a personal letter: Where do you live? Always, always begin your meeting with a discussion about where you live and work.

*Do not generalize about your profession or where you work.* If you say, “I work for a major national health care organization,” you’ve just blown your hook. You need to share the name of the street you live on or the name and address of the specific company in the district you work for. A good introduction would be, “I am a radiologist for Shoreline County Hospital on Route 1 in South Wales. I’ve worked there for seventeen years.” Now your legislator is listening because she understands your geography.

### Line

*Line* is your choice: a strong argument or your personal story. Remember that you are going to have to be mindful of the time. As in any other grassroots communication, this is your chance to put a local face on yet another arcane, dry legislative issue. No lobbyist and no low-impact grassroots campaign will have this opportunity. Politely and briefly share what it was that brought you to the issue and why you think your legislator should share your viewpoint. If you don’t make it real, nobody else is going to.



### Illustration 16.3. Hook, Line, and Sinker: The Three Parts of a Legislative Meeting

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#### **Before the Meeting**

Arrive ten to fifteen minutes before your appointment and meet with your group. Review your talking points and request, and then review what each person will contribute to the meeting. Assign one person to begin the meeting and one person to end it.

#### **Hook (who you are)**

Everyone should briefly introduce themselves at the start of the meeting. This is your chance to remind the legislator that you are constituents. Consider sharing a few unique personal details to underscore the fact that your group represents a broad cross-section from the district.

#### **Line (why you care—local stories and statistics)**

Provide the legislator with local stories or a strong argument. Lawmakers especially appreciate real-life examples that put a face on an issue.

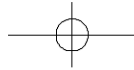
#### **Sinker (your request or ask)**

Stay on message! Make a clear request of the legislator or the staff. Ask for a commitment, and then listen carefully to the response. Legislative offices often need some time to consider supporting or opposing legislation, but they will often share important insights into their decision-making process. Remember to thank them before you leave.

#### **After the Meeting**

Briefly meet with your group outside the office to compare impressions and identify any follow-up work that needs to take place such as sending requested information to the office or reporting the results of your exchange back to the group that scheduled your meeting. Get business cards from any staff you meet with, and send a thank-you note soon after your visit. Such notes help you form long-term, business-like relationships with these offices.





### **Sinker**

*Sinker* is your request. This is where you have to stay on message if you are participating in a Lobby Day or other organized grassroots event put together by an interest group. If your network is asking for a representative to cosponsor a bill, then you've got to ask her to cosponsor that bill *and nothing else*. Legislative offices are always overwhelmed with their workloads, so help them focus on a specific action that would help your cause by not piling on extraneous requests.

It is not rude for you to make a specific request of your elected officials. They are often relieved if you give them a single specific action that they can take to demonstrate their support for your issues. You cannot simply ask your lawmakers to empathize with you. Caring is not enough, and they expect you to ask them to take action.

After you have made your request, give your representative time to respond—to share what she thinks about the issue and if she is inclined to see things your way. You do not want to miss out on this feedback by saving your request to the last possible second so that there is no time for the legislator to respond.

### **WHAT IF YOUR REPRESENTATIVE IS NEGATIVE OR NONCOMMITTAL ABOUT YOUR REQUEST?**

Your elected officials will almost always try to make you happy if they can. Sometimes you will be on opposite sides of an issue. If your representative disagrees with your position, do not go into a meltdown. Do not continue to badger him with your reasons. Instead, try to really understand where he is coming from. If you listen to his concerns, he will be more likely to meet with you again in the future, and he will be more open to changing his mind in the future. You, on the other hand, will have the information you need to regroup, perhaps to reframe your arguments to reflect your representative's concerns the next time you communicate.

It is much more common at a face-to-face meeting with your legislator that he will be noncommittal. Lawmakers generally do not like to commit to