Your Legislator's World: What the Heck Is He Thinking?

Let's consider how your legislator looks at his world, the problems he faces, the world he lives in – things that color his attitudes and thinking.

He wants to do a good job. Each of us wants to do a good job, but we sometimes forget that this basic human drive applies to elected officials, too.

He wants to get re-elected. He knows he can't be truly effective out of office. Like you, he likes his job and wants to keep it. Re-election is public proof that he has done a good job. He wants to be associated with issues that will help him get re-elected.

He wants to be responsive. He's in the business of pleasing people and sincerely wants to accommodate you – but not at any cost. Other considerations may prevent him from doing so.

He is not an expert in your business. It took you years to acquire your knowledge of your industry or profession. Don't expect him to have your familiarity with industry problems. Share your knowledge with him.

He is busy. A legislator is public property. Everyone wants a piece of his time. His workload is staggering. Don't waste his time. Get to the point and get out. He'll appreciate your savvy.

He lives in the world of the possible. Legislatures are made up of distinct personalities representing widely varying constituencies and viewpoints. It is extremely difficult to reach agreement on anything. Consequently, compromise is a way of life – not a shabby sell out. He rarely gets to vote on the exact bill he favors. He must think in terms of what will pass, not necessarily what is ideal.

He is beset by conflicting pressures. Reduce taxes, but don't cut spending. Cut spending, but not the program. Tax him, not me. Cut inflation, but prevent recession. Support your party leadership, but be independent, and on and on.

He has no accurate barometer of constituent thinking. Mail and e-mail might give him a clue, but most of the time he can only guess.

He's elected to use his judgment. He wants to consider constituent opinion and does, but in the final analysis, he must study all available information and trust his judgment.

He wants to know how his legislation will affect his district. This is where you, the constituent, can really help. You can show him a bill's impact on the people he represents.

He is concerned with dozens of bills. Hundreds of bills are introduced each session. He can't possibly be familiar with all of them. Don't expect him to be familiar with the details of your legislation.

He is likely to forget names and faces. A legislator meets thousands of people every year. Although he tries hard to remember names and faces, it's almost impossible. Don't be offended if he forgets yours. In subsequent meetings, do him a favor and reintroduce yourself. He will appreciate it.

He won't base his assistance on your past support of him. He's elected to serve all his people, not just those who supported him. If you're a supporter, he'll want to justify

that support. If you're not, he has a chance to win you over. He'll do what he can either way, so don't feel defensive if your party affiliations or philosophy differs from his.

He deserves respectful treatment. The office in politics is a position of respect and achievement. He will respect your views as a constituent and is due reciprocal respect for his, even if they conflict with yours.

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