

## How can I, a nurse, communicate for political success?

“Politics is the process of influencing the allocation of scarce resources – figuratively, influencing who gets a slice of the pie, how big it is, and whether they get ice cream too” (Chaffee, 2007, p. 121).

Have you ever been in the presence of a politician and didn't know what to say or how to advocate for your cause? Think about whom you may run into. Most of us won't run into the President of the United States. Think about a city council representative, a state senator, a school board member. Here are some tips to help you make connections with politicians from a local level to a national level.



1. This can occur anywhere; waiting for the kids to get out of school, running into a representative at the coffee shop, or attending a campaign function. Think about the issues that affect you, your family, your community. Think ahead about what you would say if you ran into someone that can influence those issues.
2. Practice communicating effectively. Pay attention to your spoken words. Think about your eye contact and gestures. Consider your appearance. Is what you are saying, verbally and nonverbally, what you intend to say?
3. Make an approach (practice it in a mirror if it helps your confidence) and introduce yourself. Offer a handshake and say, “Hi, Senator Wallman, my name is Jodi Nelson. It’s a pleasure to meet you” or simply, “Hi, my name is Jodi Nelson, it’s good to meet you.” Face them with confidence and speak clearly, smile. If you are at an event where you have to wear a nametag, make sure your name is clearly written.
4. Now what? Start the conversation. For example, “I understand you are introducing a bill to limit the nurse-patient ratio in acute care facilities” and continue to share your thoughts on the subject. Talk about your experiences. Most politicians are not nurses and they really do want to hear from those who know best. If nurses don’t talk, they can only guess how their decisions will affect us.
5. Listen. Really listen. Make eye contact. Nurses can be among the best listeners so use this skill effectively when in this situation.
6. Offer to follow up with more information. What if they ask a question you can’t answer? Offer to find the answer and get back to them or tell them your experiences don’t allow you to answer it effectively. Be truthful about whatever you tell them!
7. Thank them at the end of the conversation. Sending a follow up thank you card or letter is also a nice touch.

So what brings the conversation to a screeching halt? Being unprepared or talking about the subject as if you know everything but really don’t know anything. Interrupting. Complaining about insignificant things that seem to be brought up time and time again (the timing of traffic lights) or complaining about something but not having any solutions in mind.

Chaffee, M. (2007). Communication skills for political success. In Mason, D., Leavitt, J., and Chaffee, M. (Ed.) *Policy & Politics in Nursing and Health Care*. (5<sup>th</sup> Ed.). (pp. 121-127). St. Louis, MO: Saunders Elsevier.