

Wendy Riemann: Advantageous Advocacy: Two words that must be said: Thank you

Posted on Thursday, Mar 16, 2017

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THANK YOU. Two simple words, yet too often we find them too difficult to say, or worse, we do not think about saying them. In fact, the only words some might deem harder to utter are “I’m sorry.”

In an informal survey 1492 Communications conducted of dozens of Capitol Hill offices, 50 percent of respondents said they received a thank you note from less than half of groups after a meeting. Of the thank you notes received, the majority were by email. It is also worth noting that a couple staff did not care about receiving a note, while for others, the groups that sent a sincere, handwritten thank you note were remembered best; several staff mentioned keeping those notes and/or displaying them at their desk. (A nice note can be reread – a memory of a conversation often fades over time – and an email deleted).

From an advocacy standpoint, sending a timely thank you note – whether by email or handwritten (or both, depending on timeframes) – is good business. It reminds the staff person of the group and its issue. It is also important for follow-up (the topic of a future column). After all, a smart person would never interview for a job without sending a follow-up thank you note to the interviewer. Advocacy is no different.

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From a decent human being standpoint, saying “thank you” to someone who made

time to meet is simply the right thing to do. Ergo, make the note heartfelt, not bureaucratic or perfunctory.

Holding fast that taxpayer dollars pay the salaries of elected officials and their staff, thereby granting a person a pass on needing to say “thanks,” is as shortsighted as believing that a parent never needs to thank his child for something because he gave the child life.

Yes, a person chooses to serve in public office, which might entitle him to some job perks, however, public service can often be a thankless job.

So send thank you notes. Notes never go out of style and are never too late to send. For the record, not having a card or stamp is a poor excuse. Getting a card, stamp, and address is far easier than moving legislation, or most other things in life, so buy a box of thank you notes, a book of stamps and keep them together in a drawer for easy access.

When writing the note, even consider taking it up a notch by adding in a specific explanation to the thanks, such as “you doing XYZ is allowing for XYZ.” Or, “our talk really left an impression on me and how I want to serve in the future.”

Demonstrate recognition for the time spent together, as well as the work or impact. And if you really want to ensure the official sees the note, also mention the name of the staff person who did great work (but only if he really did great work).

Here is the secret: if we make expressing thanks part of our daily life by putting down our phone to thank the clerk checking us out at the store, by politely waving at the car who let us in the lane or being the car to let someone in our lane, and by wishing the building staff a nice day – it becomes only natural to say “thank you” for a meeting where someone took the time to listen to a group’s advocacy efforts.

Many of us are currently giving up things in sacrifice for Lent. Why not also use this time to make a more diligent effort to actively change behavior? Or, if it must be thought about in terms of giving up – give up ingratitude. Give up taking things or people for granted. Give up rushing to the next task before expressing thanks for the first one. Let us make a more conscious effort to give thanks year-round, not just during the holiday season.

We can start by giving thanks for living in the United States. Regardless of our elected leaders or progress moving our advocacy issues, compared to the majority

of other people on our planet, we won the lottery by being born here.

THANK YOU for reading!

— Riemann is president of *1492 Communications*, a consulting firm. Like [1492 Communications](#) on Facebook to learn more.