

## **Advocate to Both Inform AND Persuade**

What are the ingredients for a successful advocate? Answers may differ depending upon various points of view.

“Advocate”, as defined by Webster, means “to recommend” or “to maintain by argument.” Whether it is for themselves or the brain injury community as a whole, brain injury advocates recommend actions, decision and positions to decision makers in state and federal government. In order to be effective (i.e. their recommendations are used), advocates must be informative AND persuasive

### **What can an advocate do to be both informative AND persuasive?**

First, the advocate must convey the basic facts of an issue before being persuasive. To be informative, try the following:

- **Understand the person to whom you are advocating:** Do as much research on your “audience” (i.e. those who are receiving the advocacy message) as possible. Gather facts on their education and professional backgrounds as well as personal information. You may find a connection with your audience that will build a bridge and, as a result, increase your chances of making your advocacy efforts more effective. For example, one lawmaker was related to a person with brain injury. Therefore, this particular lawmaker was more sensitive toward brain injury issues.
- **Be organized:** Know what your advocacy goal is. Have a beginning, middle and end to your advocacy endeavor. Open with a compelling statement and end with a request. One way to organize material is abide by the format, “Tell them what you are going to tell them, tell them, tell them what you told them.”
- **Define certain words/phrases:** To avoid confusion, be prepared to define any words which the audience may not understand. For example, if you are educating a newly-elected lawmaker about the importance of passing the federal Traumatic Brain Injury Act, be sure to define what the Act is and does.
- **Be factual:** Facts are crucial for being informative. Keep it basic at first. Be prepared to convey the “who, what, where, when, how, why and to what extent” of a particular issue. Cite recognized authorities to support the facts you convey. For example, you may cite the Connecticut Department of Public Health when conveying facts relative to the number of brain injuries that occur in a given year.
- **Use visual aids:** Visual aids such as hand-outs, slides, posters etc. can save hundreds, if not thousands, of words. It can save time, increase the chances of your message being clear and, most important, increase the chances that your overall advocacy effort will be effective.

The second element is to be persuasive. To be persuasive, you may want to use the following sequence:

- **Attention:** Your opening should seize the audience’s attention. Compelling statistics and personal stories are two such ways to grab the attention of those you advocate.
- **Need:** Here, you state the existing need or problem and why it is important the audience listens to you. It is here you want to be particularly informative (you may use the preceding action steps conveyed above).
- **Satisfaction:** It is here that you present your solution to the need, problem, challenge, etc. Be prepared to discuss how the solution can be helpful to you and/or the brain injury community.
- **Visualization:** At this point, draw a picture of future conditions should your request be honored. Also, show what could occur should your request not be honored.
- **Action:** Your final step is to ask the audience to take a specific action and gain a commitment from them.

As an advocate, think of yourself as both a teacher and sales representative. To achieve your advocacy goals, the advocate must be able to both provide valuable information AND persuade the audience to honor your position.

*Adapted with permission from the Brain Injury Alliance of New Jersey.*