

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 more informative, try the following:

- Understand the person to whom you are advocating: Do as much research on the “advocates (i.e. those who are receiving the advocacy message)” as possible. Gather facts on their education and professional backgrounds as well as any personal information. You may find a connection with the “advocatee” that will build a bridge and, as a result, increase your chances of making your advocacy endeavors more effective. For example, one former 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 advocatee 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 New Jersey Department of Health & Senior Services when conveying facts relative to the number of brain injuries that occur in a given year.
- Use visual aides: Visual aides 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 advocatee’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 advocatee 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. For example, when New Jersey state government added 50 slots to the Traumatic Brain Injury Medicaid Waiver last year, they provided a valuable service at lower cost to the State of New Jersey. When advocating for the cause, our Association stated this and also stated that the State would waste money if the 50 slots were not added.

- Action: Your final step is to ask the advocate 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 advocate to honor your position.