



How to be Effective and How to not be Terribly Ineffective:  
Building Relationships with Legislators  
Speakers: Sonny Dixon and Lee Hughes  
Governor's Tourism Conference in Savannah, September 1, 2015

Fundamentals of getting to know your legislators:

- Everybody's approachable; these are everyday people. Get to know them.
- Don't be intimidated.
- Cannot start from scratch once the issue is on the table.
- Any conversation you have on an issue should be a continuation of the relationship you've built.
- Respect differences of opinion.
- Don't talk a single issue with your legislator for the first 6 months of your relationship.
- Do not start a petition – not effective.
- Do not trash anyone on social media or on the editorial page. This will not help you get them to consider your position.
- Respect the committee process. Get to know all of them, not just the ones from your area but the key committee leaders too.

Fundamentals of meeting with your legislators:

- Method is sometimes more important than content – use your manners. Do not look at your phone while in a meeting.
- Bring data – good, solid information. Bring the issue and show both sides.
- Also bring potential solutions. Not just the problem but answers too.
- And bring some other people that feel the way you do.
- *"Remember what you say to whom you say and how you say it."*  
*"Treat today's friends as if they may be tomorrow's enemies and today's enemies as if they may be tomorrow's friends."* – Eugene Talmadge
- Sonny Dixon says that is good advice in business, in family, in church and in the legislature.



Top Ten Takeaways from this Session:

1. Even if you're flagrantly in disagreement, you can be agreeable.
2. Tomorrow is a new day.
3. The person who crossed you today may be the one person who can pull your fat out of the fire tomorrow.
4. Stay in touch year-round. Consider that the legislators that are attending this conference are taking time away from their business to be here.
5. Remember this is a citizen legislature – the legislators get paid approx. \$17,000 annually.
6. Ask questions – What's brewing on your plate Senator? Show interest in and learn about their issues.
7. Be a resource.
8. The GA Legislature is a people business, and tourism is a people industry.
9. Goal: to meet every one of the legislators who are here at the conference. Thank them for coming and ask about their district. Offer your card and let them know they can call on you.
10. Don't allow the moment of awkward – here at the conference or anywhere you have the opportunity for an introduction. Walk right up and introduce yourself.