

THE SHOWALTER GROUP, INC.

The Influence Advantage for PAC and Grassroots Victory

The Persuasive PAC TSG's PAC Development Philosophy

Why is PAC Participation Stuck?

PAC fundraising best practices, such as peer to peer recruitment, senior management support, etc., are well known among seasoned PAC professionals. Yet, the average PAC participation rate has stayed in the 18%-33% range for the last 15 years (BIPAC). With the proliferation of PAC fundraising best practices, why isn't PAC participation at 90%? I believe it's because the rationale for joining the PAC is poorly developed and does not take into consideration the science of PAC persuasion.

I see three additional reasons for this stagnation:

- Over-emphasis on education vs. persuasion
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- PAC pitches that are "one size fits all" messages
- over- reliance on patriotic themes and clichés to persuade

But Wait, There's More!

In addition to these fundraising mistakes, there are also the challenges like over-reliance on senior management support, solely using legislative issues as a fundraising motivator, focus on short-term compliance, and making your lobbyist the face of the PAC---all of which violate what the social science tells us is required to gain long-term commitment. However, this article will focus on the "big three" that need to change if PAC fundraising professionals want to make their lives easier.

Education vs. Persuasion

We believe that association and professional society members can't be "educated" (and to some degree motivated) into contributing to a PAC, they must be *persuaded* to join. I am often asked the difference between motivation and persuasion. When an individual is persuaded, he or she has taken internal ownership of the decision. We are certainly not averse to motivation, and all PAC pitches must be motivational, but we believe it is over rated as a technique. It produces a short term result that must be repeated for the desired behavior to take place. For a healthy PAC, the goal should be *long-term emotional allegiance*, which is achieved absent of coercion.

The social science research shows that there is a big gap between evidence-based arguments (the educational approach) and successful persuasion. Evidence-based arguments achieve a .18 correlation (which is very weak) in persuading someone,

especially when your audience is not *involved or interested in your issue*. (This, not coincidentally, represents most organization's PAC audiences.)

For example, how many of your members are closely attuned to politics and legislative issues? How many really understand the impact of legislative decision on their business?

One Size Does Not Fit All

Pac persuasion is a moving target. Our experience with a variety of industries and professions has shown that the motivation for contributing (and not contributing) to a PAC varies based on the organizational context, the primacy of their legislative challenges, the local and state political context, and the "calling" of the industry or profession. There is no "one size fits all" rationale or message that motivates someone to contribute to a PAC. (Run as fast as you can from anyone telling you that they know the most motivating PAC messages.)

Long-term engagement requires investigation, and not the kind (which I have unfortunately seen outside "experts" use) that simply asks someone why they do or don't contribute. The methodology matters, and several data collection methods are required for reliable results.

They Aren't You

One of the biggest mistakes made by those wishing to persuade others is the belief that "If only my audience knows what I know, they will think the same way I think." That's naïve and overlooks our influence prospect's values and political beliefs.

This explains the proliferation of patriotic themes in PAC recruitment messages and materials. Because they are political professionals, and most political types are truly patriotic; they are inspired by patriotic quotes and stories. They believe in the best of the Democratic system.

But your PAC prospects aren't like you. In fact, in over 12 years of research with a variety of PAC clients, *not one focus group or survey project finding has shown civic duty or patriotic pride as a rationale for PAC engagement*. That's something worth paying attention to. In fact, out of thousands of individual research project respondents, I can count on one hand the numbers who cite patriotism as a motivator. It's an outlier response.

In essence, it does not matter what you as a government relations professional think about politics, grassroots, PAC's, civic involvement, etc. What matters is what your *audience* thinks about those things.

Do you know what they think? Are you incorporating that to gain their allegiance?

Like many decisions, contributing to a PAC is an emotional decision. It is a request that involves politics and personal money, two highly charged topics. It is a much tougher influence challenge than selling a tangible product. Therefore, we need to use all the

tools available to achieve our desired outcomes, namely, solid research that reveals the value systems and persuasion triggers of our prospects. That, *combined with a* disciplined recruitment approach, goals, accountability and *visible* board member, as well as organizational exemplar support, will bring in the funds.

If you find your PAC fundraising stuck and you can identify with these challenges, contact us for some new approaches so that you can have a *Persuasive PAC*.