

# How to build trust with new members of Congress (and people you don't like)

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*Bloomberg Government regularly publishes insights, opinions and best practices from our community of senior leaders and decision-makers. This column is written by Amy Showalter, a national authority on government relations best practices, grassroots and PAC influence.*

Many advocacy groups now find themselves in a quandary. They need to be loyal to those who helped them in the past, but they also must recognize the changed political environment and build new relationships. How can you do this when your organization has been apathetic about building relationships with those who don't agree with your positions?

The science of influence and one of its key elements—trusting relationships— isn't new. It's been dissected by the social sciences since the 1940's. I think what *is* new are the nuances of building next-level relationships. I define the “next level” as trusting relationships with those whose values you *don't share*, those with whom you *don't have a history of cooperation*, and individuals you *don't particularly like*. For example, some of the new members of Congress!

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### The Danger in Breathing Your Own Exhaust

Many organizations spend their time developing and enhancing relationships with legislators who already philosophically agree with their public policy positions. And why not? It's easier, takes less time to build trust, and there is instant comfort in the similarity of shared beliefs.

Working on building even more trust with your fans is never a bad thing, but it may not be where you should spend a majority of your relationship capital. They already share your value system, so many of your requests will be agreed to because you are on the same mission. I often refer to this as “breathing your own exhaust.”

Fortunately, social psychologists have found techniques to help us accelerate the trust-building process. You can take this quiz to assess your organization's TQ (Trust Quotient).

#### What's your TQ?

Give yourself 5 points for every “yes” answer. Ask yourself. . .

1. Are you engaging in disconfirming behaviors with your influence prospect, or are you saying exactly what the legislator would expect you to say?
2. Do you train your advocates how to argue against self-interest when meeting with legislators?
3. Do you give your advocates talking points that include the negative consequences of voting in favor of your position?
4. Do you share the weaknesses in your position with you advocates, or tell them to “Just tell your story” when talking with lawmakers?
5. Are you “stealing thunder” when advocating for your position, and are you teaching your advocates to “steal thunder?”
6. Are you creating an internal historical record of your stakeholders who have suffered for your cause?

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### Score yourself:

20-30 points = Congratulations! Your organization has a high TQ. Retain your culture of “trust training.”

10-15 points = You have room to improve. Less than 10 points: = Re-examine your current influence tactics. Persuade your organizational leaders that high TQ practices are necessary and start promoting a culture of high-trust advocacy.