



The Showalter Group, Inc.
The Influence Advantage for PAC and Grassroots Victory

DEVELOPING A *PURPOSEFUL* PAC TSG'S PAC DEVELOPMENT PHILOSOPHY

A Purposeful PAC

We believe that your PAC should have a purpose beyond being a conduit for candidate contributions. It should exist for more reasons than to raise funds. It should be a *Purposeful PAC*—one that raises and disburses funds to deserving candidates, and also *creates an emotional allegiance* to your company, industry or profession.

Increased emotional allegiance to your organization favorably positions the government relations team, because a major frustration of organization leaders, particularly corporate executives, is that employees do not care about or understand the external forces that impact their jobs. This is manifested by their incredulity (expressed in private) that employees would vote for a certain candidate or political party. What they don't understand is that a significant number of their employees don't identify themselves as an organizational stakeholder, so the ubiquitous "legislative updates" in PAC communications and fundraising appeals don't resonate.

Education vs. Persuasion

We believe that PAC prospects 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 the technique is over rated. 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*. (Which, not coincidentally, represents most PAC prospects.) For example, how many of your prospects are closely attuned to politics and legislative issues? How many

really understand the impact of legislative decisions on their jobs or profession? If we surveyed your employees, would they know which government regulations pose the most risk to your company?

However, what do we typically read on PAC websites and hear in many PAC presentations? How a bill becomes law, the structure of the government relations department, why PAC participation is one's civic responsibility, and my personal favorite, the role of the FEC in political fundraising.

(Presentations with little else are usually punctuated with the thud of audience members falling face first to the floor.)

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. Long-term engagement requires investigation not the simple questions about why they do or don't contribute. The methodology matters, and several data collection methods are required for reliable results.

Therefore, one of the many reasons it is important to conduct message testing via several data collection methods is because 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." It ignores our influence prospects' values and political beliefs.

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. Plus, the money is allocated to a person or cause who will not provide a tangible result to the giver. 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 organizational exemplar support will bring in the funds.

A Note About Patriotic Themes as Persuasive Messages

Many government relations professionals rush to incorporate patriotism into their PAC pitches. Why? Because they are political professionals, and most political types are truly patriotic, or they wouldn't be in the profession.

But your PAC prospects aren't like you. In fact, in over 18 years of research with a variety of PAC clients, not one focus group or survey project finding has shown that "civic duty" or patriotic pride is 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 those who cite patriotism as a motivator; they are outliers.

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 topics, and their current "location" ---- where their thoughts are at any particular moment.

Do you know what they think? Are you using that to gain their allegiance and thus create a *Purposeful PAC*?

The Bottom Line

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 one reason is that the rationale for joining the PAC is poorly developed and does not take into consideration the science of how your stakeholders are persuaded.

Other PAC fundraising challenges include mistakes like overreliance 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 these tactics are refuted by what the social sciences reveal is required to gain long-term emotional commitment to not just your PAC but to your organization-----to achieve a *Purposeful PAC*.

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