



business philosophy

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Get Hooked on Business Advocacy

The words “public policy” and “fun” are considered by most people to be mutually exclusive terms. For the purposes of this article, think of “fun” not so much as amusement, but as the pleasure of feeling personal satisfaction for an effort rewarded.

Consider the world of sports—a source of easy if hackneyed terms overused by peddlers of the latest management book (i.e. “work teams” or “business coach”). So take golf. Not being a golfer, I nevertheless feel qualified to use golfing as an analogy to define fun. A vast number of people consider golf to be fun, even though many outings end up in total frustration. But each time out brings renewed hope: the anticipation of a hole-in-one, the satisfaction of sinking the long putt or the exhilaration of finally beating the handicap—which pretty much sums up the process of having fun in the world of public policy advocacy.

In an effort to keep you reading this article, it is important to point out that public policy is not synonymous with politics. I understand that people are sick of politics, a feeling not without merit. The difference is that public policy is issues-oriented as opposed to politics, which is candidate- or party-oriented. Public policy is any law, statute, ordinance or regulation that affects the public—you, me or our businesses. Public policy advocacy simply means encouraging those in decision-making positions to see things your way: advocating for your point of view on an issue. Obviously as an advocate you win some, lose some. But winning feels great.

If you are a business owner, what do you do every day? Hire or fire an employee? Given the number of regulations, simply having employees is a virtual minefield of potential lawsuits for the small business owner. Pay your phone and utility bills? They are bloated with taxes and add-on charges that came about because of policy decisions made with little representation for small businesses.

Search for an affordable health care program to offer your employees? Get a business loan? Pay taxes? I think the point is made. Virtually every step of running a small business is influenced by, or some would say mired in, public policy. Either way, it is possible to change the type of policies that are imposed on us.

Changing the policies requires that we, as business owners, get hooked. And I’m not referring to a bad golf swing. Getting hooked on public policy happens when you have personally advocated for an issue and have learned that your voice was in fact valued by an elected official.

It happens when you get a score, a win, helping influence how a piece of legislation actually gets drafted. As more business owners experience the hook, they become better informed. Better informed business owners become more consistent and reliable voters as well as advocates. You win, your company wins and by extension so do all small business. But you cannot win if you are not playing, and ignorance keeps you absent from the game. Getting hooked on public policy is a learned behavior and does require a bit of effort, but not as much as most people assume.

If you want what is good for your business, take advantage of the existing organizations that are already researching policies and advocating for small business such as the **NFIB**, **NAWBO**, **KC-CWBO**, **WIPP**, **MAMBDC** or your local chambers. Advocacy is not so much hard work as it is consistent work. These organizations provide a consistent voice for small business, so build on their expertise and actively advocate about an issue important to you.

Policy decisions are made at all levels, including city, county, state and federal, so plenty of opportunities exist for well-intentioned government employees to mess up your business. Pay attention. You might get hooked, and you might get to experience the pleasure of public policy fun. **KCB**



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