

**Nonprofit Advocacy is EASY**  
*National Council of Nonprofits*

**The simple truth is: Advocacy is easy.**

That's right, it's easy. Anyone can do it. How easy is it? Well, it's so easy that even first graders do it! Let's go to a local elementary school playground and see what lessons can be learned from first graders ...

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**ADVOCACY LESSON #1: Advocacy Happens Everywhere**

*First Graders:*

Although first graders don't use terms like "advocacy" or "lobby," their conversations reveal they practice advocacy all the time, including:

- *At home:* "I got my mom to let me stay up late last night to watch that movie"
- *In the classroom:* "We got our teacher to give us an extra 10 minutes for lunch"

*Nonprofits:*

We already advocate (convince, educate, explain, persuade, support, etc.) before a variety of audiences, including:

- *Funders:* We persuade them to invest in our ideas and programs
- *Volunteers:* We motivate them to continue to give their time and energy

**Practice Pointer**

If nonprofits are as smart as first graders, then we will remember that **advocacy happens everywhere there are people**, so don't assume we have to travel to Congress to be an advocate. Indeed, nonprofits often can be most effective at state and local levels of government.

*Many of us think that lobbying is a mysterious rite that takes years to master. It isn't. You can learn how to lobby—whom to call, when, what to say—in minutes. While there are a few simple reporting rules your organization needs to follow, it isn't complicated. Countless numbers of people have learned how. Center for Lobbying in the Public Interest*

## ADVOCACY LESSON #2: Leverage Matters

### *First Graders:*

When playing simple games, first graders quickly discover that “leverage matters”:

- *See-saw*: the side with the greatest weight goes down while the lighter side can flip up and fly off
- *Tug-of-War*: the side with the greatest weight usually wins

### *Nonprofits:*

Nonprofits enjoy automatic strength and weight through the numbers we have from:

- *Our built-in allies*: staff, board members, volunteers, funders, clients, vendors, friends, families, and more.

### **Practice Pointer**

If nonprofits are as smart as first graders, then we will **call on our natural allies for help**. Plus, we will look for ways to get more people on our side so we can get more leverage—through the media, technology, and old-fashioned relationship-building—to maximize the weight on our side of policy positions.

*There is a mystique surrounding advocacy—that you have to be an expert on your issue, or an expert in the way the process works. Not so. Advocacy is like anything else: beginners are not expected to know as much as professionals, and the more you do it the easier it gets. Nancy Amidei, in *So You Want to Make a Difference: Advocacy is the Key!**

## ADVOCACY LESSON #3: Experience Adds Value

### *First Graders:*

- *Teammates*: When picking players for the next game of kickball, captains normally select first those players known to be good or who, under the captain’s watchful eye, look like they would add some advantage such as size, speed, or agility.
- *Practice*: After school, you often see kids still playing on the playground, building their skills for the future.

### *Nonprofits:*

- *Teammates*: We seek proven, experienced staff, board, and volunteers. So when engaging in advocacy, we also need to scout for the experienced or talented players, because advocacy is a team sport.
- *Practice*: We can practice our advocacy skills by watching others, getting training, and seeking experience in the field.

### **Practice Pointer**

If nonprofits are as smart as first graders, then we will not only **pick our teammates wisely**, but we will also practice to **develop our own skill sets**.