



THRILL ON THE HILL

**Using Congressional Testimony to
Achieve Public Policy Success**

Ed Barks

© 2024, 2021, 2019, 2015 Edward J. Barks

(703) 533-0403

www.barkscomm.com

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without the express written consent of the author, except for the use of brief quotations in a critical article or review.

Every word and thought in this paper was written by a living, breathing human being. No artificial intelligence schemes were used. Remedies for violation of copyright laws by users, whether intentional or unintentional, may be pursued.



Executive Summary

It's the most important business meeting you'll ever have.

Done right, five minutes spent testifying before a Congressional committee means attaining your public policy goals, pushing legislation that can make billions for your company, and burnishing your reputation — both organizationally and personally.

Done wrong, you are in a world of hurt. Think of all the corporate and association officials who have been trotted before Congress, filleted, and left with a never-to-be rehabilitated image.

**It's the most important
business meeting you'll
ever have.**

How can you place yourself as a winner when petitioning your government officials? That is what this research report intends to reveal. I surveyed some really smart people — government relations experts who counsel executives on [best testimony practices](#) on a regular basis. I've overlaid some of my own experiences, too.

It is important to note that the same principles apply whether you testify in person or by remote video connection, as has become more common since the onset of the pandemic.

The findings revolve around a series of essential questions that must be considered by any company or association representative who plans to take a seat at the witness table. This research attempts to tease out answers to such riddles as:

- What traits do successful witnesses share?
- What can be done to mentally prepare witnesses to avoid intimidation?
- What are the major differences between the oral statement and the written testimony?
- What procedures should you follow when drafting the oral statement?
- What steps do smart businesses take to prepare a witness for delivering the oral statement and managing the Q&A?
- How important is Congressional staff?
- How do you organize a training program that prepares witnesses to deliver oral testimony?
- What about follow up steps?

- What methods can be used to debrief witnesses and [assess feedback](#)?
- How do you use today's testimony to get better when testifying the next time?

These last three questions bear particular examination. It is one of my longstanding frustrations as a communications strategy consultant that so few organizations and executives heed the need to improve over time. They neglect opportunities capable of advancing their careers and causes. My hope is that this report can open eyes to the fact that sharpening one's communications edge is a lifetime endeavor, not one to be revisited only when an important opportunity — such as testifying before Congress — looms.

An editorial note about the mechanics of this research. An online survey link was distributed to select government relations experts — individuals who are on the front lines of the Congressional testimony battles (a pre-select question was used to screen out those who did not qualify). Some opted not to be identified by name, a request I respected. My thanks go out to all who contributed their insights.

Another note: Throughout the report, the term most frequently used to describe those elected to either the U.S. House of Representatives or Senate is

This research attempts to tease out answers to the riddles surrounding Congressional testimony.

“member of Congress.” Note that this is a general term that applies both to representatives and senators. My thanks to the late Professor Irving Fisher, one of my political science mentors, for instilling this belief. It is generally true that senators hate being referred to as “Congressman” or “Congresswoman.” Yet it is no more inaccurate than applying that label to members of the House who, in the interest of accuracy should be called “Representative.”

Okay, that's the end of the linguistic lesson. Let's get to the findings that can put you on the right track toward achieving your critical public policy goals during your next bout of testimony.

What traits do successful witnesses share?

If you were to quiz a group of corporate executives on what makes for an effective CEO, you'd likely get a range of responses. Confident? Direct? Warm? Decisive? Sure, all those might apply. But it is unlikely that one CEO would exhibit all of those qualities.

So it is with executives who provide testimony before Congressional committees and subcommittees. Each has a distinct set of strengths and challenges as a [public speaker](#). Still, there are common attributes that one must possess in order to navigate the sometimes rocky shoals of the witness table in a Capitol Hill hearing room.

As Tom McMahon, a public affairs and communications executive, notes, the basis of a worthy witness revolves around “good presentation and speaking skills” in addition to the “ability to bridge to established messaging.”

Time and again, respondents returned to several predominant themes:

- Storytelling
- Ability to deal with questions from Congressional committee members
- Having important facts and figures readily at hand

In the words of one, “The ability to tell a powerful story” and to “be fully prepared for questions” reigned supreme. Another emphasized the “ability to provide both factual data and personal stories that support their point(s).”

A subsequent question in this series deals with the notion of Q&A in greater depth (for deeper insights into the process of dealing with sometimes tricky questions, see the position paper [“Does Anybody Have Any Questions for My Answers? The 411 on Q&A”](#)). Consider this overview from one expert, who cited the need for “doing research on each member to anticipate their questions; knowing your role on the panel and what keen insight only you can provide; not [being] afraid to tell members of Congress that you don’t know the

There are common attributes that one must possess in order to navigate the sometimes rocky shoals of the witness table in a Capitol Hill hearing room.

answer to their question but will get back to them in writing; [and to] be as specific as possible and offer them solutions to policy problems” in your responses.

Nonverbal signals also play a large role in the success (or lack thereof) of Congressional relations efforts (for a more complete treatment of nonverbal communication, see [“How Important Are Nonverbal Signals?”](#)). One of the keys, as President of TVW Renee Radcliff Sinclair explains, is “the ability to make eye contact with Congressional members (it builds credibility).”

Patience is often cited as one of life’s virtues. That holds true when testifying on Capitol Hill. Witnesses must exhibit a “willingness to explain to uninformed or hostile members in a patient and respectful manner,” according to one expert surveyed.

Mental outlook also matters. When asked what made for a successful witness, one government relations pro shined a light on a key piece of perceptual preparation: “Realization that this is theater.”

Bottom line: It’s a business deal, so make good use of all the tools at your beck and call.

What is the Five Minute Approach?

What can you do in five minutes? You could deal with a handful of emails. You could glance through today’s business news. You could order lunch online for delivery.

Or you could appear as a witness before Congress. The fact is that scant five-minute block is often all you have to get your message across in that public forum.

That’s why I advise utilizing the Five Minute Approach when [testifying on Capitol Hill](#). The Five Minute Approach dictates that your oral statement contains a magnetic message — one that your target audience finds irresistible — and that you capitalize on your delivery style to assert control over the proceedings.

Furthermore, it assures that you will not run over your allotted time. This happens all too often, resulting in a grumpy chairperson and an embarrassing need for the witness either to talk faster (wrong) or omit the conclusion (very wrong).

Don't waste even one precious second on perfunctory introductions or dry language exhumed from your written testimony. Your oral statement needs to be punchy and message-driven. Every word is priceless. The Five Minute Approach provides the discipline needed for a virtuoso performance at the witness table.

Organizations send their top brass to testify before government bodies for a variety of reasons. Corporate CEOs attempt to persuade Congress to enact legislation that benefits their businesses and industries. Association executives testify on Capitol Hill to further their members' public policy

goals. Environmentalists speak up in favor of laws to protect our air and water. Testifying is a powerful means of cutting through the bureaucracy and red tape.

**Don't waste even one
precious second on
perfunctory introductions or
dry language exhumed from
your written testimony.**

What are the most important considerations?

It is important to decide who will testify on your behalf. This can be a touchy subject in some organizations. Maybe your president or CEO is the best person to testify; maybe not. The point is you need to make this a conscious decision. Don't default automatically to the highest ranking or most senior individual. There may well be someone with special expertise or sharper communications skills who is a better choice. The messenger counts, so be sure to select someone who has the talent and the discipline to deliver your message forcefully.

Take plenty of time to frame your key messages (get a more detailed look at building your case in [“Eleven Elements to Model a Magnetic Message: How to Shape Your Story for the Press, Policymakers, and the Public”](#)). Know what you want to say. It sounds simple, but it takes a lot of work to get this right. If you haven't placed a premium on message development previously, now is the time to do so. Hold some message development sessions to hammer things out. This is an important step, for what you derive in these messaging sessions not only forms the core of your oral statement, but serves as your guiding light during Q&A.

Next, conduct some basic background research on the lawmakers you will face. I don't mean to suggest you hire a private detective. But do be alert to which policymakers are for you, which are against you, and which are sitting on the fence. Learn where they come from and what you can say that is of importance to their localities.

Important hint: Too many organizations try to please members of the committee who they count as backers or try in vain to persuade their opponents. Forget those approaches. Savvy witnesses aim for those members who are sitting on the fence, trying to tip them into becoming supporters.

How can witnesses deliver their message forcefully and still show deference to members of Congress?

Members of Congress are important people. If you doubt it, just ask a member of Congress. It takes a certain amount of chutzpah to subject oneself to the rigors of running for public office, so representatives and senators rarely suffer from shyness.

As a result, a high degree of obsequiousness is in order when testifying, even when addressing a clear-cut foe. In fairness, some of this seemingly over-the-top politeness makes sense. For example, business can be transacted much more readily when a member from one party refers to a colleague from the other side of the aisle as “My good friend from the Midwest” (when what they are really thinking is “That slimebucket from the sticks”) (on another parenthetical note, if someone ever refers to you as their “good friend” in a political context, watch your back).

You, too, should devolve into this overly polite language when at the witness table. Use of “Mr. Chairman” or “Madam Chair” is in order. Similarly, rank and file committee members should be addressed as “Senator Smith,” “Representative Jones,” “Mr. Day,” “Ms. Knight,” “the gentleman,” or “the gentlelady.”

A few words about the deteriorating sense of civility in our politics. Please don't play into it. While certain individuals (he said, gazing toward the Oval Office between 2017 and 2021) have set out to intentionally coarsen debate in the public arena, that doesn't mean you should join them in the gutter. When interacting with public officials, act like your mom would

want you to behave. No name calling. No rude digital media storms. Treat both allies and adversaries with respect. You may not agree; it doesn't mean you need to be disagreeable.

In the final analysis, as one survey respondent puts it, "Remember these are people." Inasmuch as they are just folks like you and me (at least to some degree), "Do not assume the member of Congress does not understand the perspective of 'everyday people.' He/she may well have a related experience in his/her own background that bear(s) on the issue being discussed. Respect them as people who are like you in many ways; remember they had a life before Congress, and in most cases, it was a life very similar to most Americans — running a

It takes a certain amount of chutzpah to subject oneself to the rigors of running for public office, so representatives and senators rarely suffer from shyness.

business, going to work, taking kids to school, etc. Also, remember, their concerns remain similar to your own — they have children, grandchildren, spouses, sick loved ones, mortgages," continues this expert.

"(I)t's important to connect personally for greater impact," says Renee Radcliff Sinclair. "Attention to the words they use (for instance, elected leaders do not like to be 'educated,' however they will listen to 'the latest information about...')." "

Still, don't let this often faux civility distract you from delivering your message. You are there to offer an important point of view, so don't back down even under intense questioning. Be respectful of the institution and its members, but stick to your views. Don't be intimidated.

"Politely restate your position until told to stop," advises one wise government relations professional.

And above all, "Don't ramble," says public affairs executive Tom McMahon.

What additional performance advice do you have?

The witness' persona in the hearing room counts for a lot. These action steps can help propel you from a backbencher to a leader.

Treat members of Congress with due deference. After all, they represent the public's interests. At the same time, refuse to be intimidated. Many public officials blatantly try to cow witnesses who appear before them. Don't buy into that. Keep in mind that you are there to enlighten them about your perspective on an important point of public policy.

Also of importance, refuse to be lured into an emotional confrontation. Remember, this is a business deal, not a personal exchange.

Follow the script and refuse to be sidetracked. Often, your worst enemy can be yourself. You worked long and hard on your oral statement, refining it so that you could nail that five-minute time limit. If you try to all of a sudden speak off the cuff, you'll force yourself

to trim something — perhaps something critical — from your statement. The witness table is a terrible place to edit on the fly.

As you speak, concentrate your eye contact on the undecideds. You've already calculated who they are as part of your preparation process. Remember, your supporters are already on your side. Your opponents will never agree with you. So take aim where the votes are.

Multiple practice rounds are mandatory. As I like to tell my clients, “Internalize to verbalize.”

What advice do you have for mentally preparing witnesses so they are not intimidated?

As noted in the previous section, it is vital to deliver your message compellingly yet politely. One of the keys to doing so at the witness table is to prepare mentally as well as substantively.

I recall preparing one witness who had a real Caspar Milquetoast personality. During our preparations, one of the main objectives was to boost his confidence. While he will never exhibit the bravado of Dwayne “The Rock” Johnson, he did comport himself well when testifying thanks to our preparation efforts.

To be sure, multiple practice rounds are mandatory. As I like to tell my clients, “Internalize to verbalize.” You must get comfortable with your message in order to deliver your testimony and respond during Q&A effectively. But there is more to the story.

Mental preparation matters, too. How are witnesses to adjust their mindset? One phrase that arose time and again from our roster of experts is the very same mantra I provide my [communications training clients](#) — Practice! Practice! Practice!

Which specific mental methods benefit the witness most? One respondent recommends “reading testimony aloud many times and doing prep Q&A with colleagues.”

Another suggests rehearsing “both their testimony and potential questions. The more comfortable they are going into it the better.” This notion of comfort should not be underplayed, though perhaps “confidence” better describes the goal. While you don’t want a witness who is comfortable to the point of bliss, tension is hardly a noted performance enhancer. A high degree of well-placed and well-earned confidence — thanks to adequate preparation and practice — will help performance before committee members.

“View this as an opportunity to share information,” says another respondent. Consider that your witness would not be on a Congressional panel were they not an expert in their field. Load them up with confidence about their knowledge and the fact that their testimony represents a golden opportunity

Make Your Preparations Count

You need more than the facts on your side when you deliver Congressional testimony.

Witness preparation and a rock solid testimony training program are mandatory. You need the power of persuasion — power capable of moving opinion leaders.

Let Ed Barks show you how to magnetize your message and sharpen your delivery skills as you prepare for your Congressional hearings.

Your witnesses will master important skills during your mock hearing:

- ✓ Craft an attention-grabbing opening statement
- ✓ Master the question and answer period
- ✓ Target the opinion leaders who really matter

Call Ed Barks at
(703) 533-0403 to
schedule your consultation
www.barkscomm.com

to persuade others to adopt your organization's stance by presenting evidence and sharing relevant stories.

As for the mechanics of bolstering confidence in your witness, Tom McMahon advocates "rehearsing responses and messages. Even better to video the rehearsal and play it back with a coach who can help evaluate the performance. Remember that there are hundreds of hearings a year, and that they are just part of a day's work for members of Congress."

I'll testify to the power of using video as a learning tool. Over more than 25 years as a communications strategy consultant, I've seen countless executives "get it" after seeing video replays of their performance. Some like what they see; others are embarrassed. But there is no doubt about the learning potential. The video doesn't lie.

One final word of caution when it comes to instilling confidence in a witness. "If a witness is too nervous, they may not be the best choice," notes one public affairs pro. That's wise advice. If you observe an overabundance of nerves during your rehearsal rounds, it may be best to pull the plug as diplomatically as possible and find a substitute. Better to cause a little embarrassment early on than to have your organization fall apart before Congress.

What are the main differences between the oral statement and the written testimony?

Here's how I explain it to my clients: You can stuff all the mind-numbing detail you want into your written submission. Charts, graphs, legal jargon, and an eye-glazing series of numbers and factoids are fine.

Your oral statement, on the other hand, must be slender and elegant. "The oral statement must include the most hard hitting points and personal stories that need to be conveyed," notes one of our survey's respondents. "That is what members will remember the most."

"Getting to the point much more quickly in the verbal testimony" is vital in the Congressional hearing room contest, replies another.

"Put the boring facts in the written testimony. Do not recite the boring facts in our oral statement," counsels a respondent.

Reinforcing your message early and often can pave a path to victory. “Hit your key points, do not go into depth or detail. Members may leave for questions so you want them to have a key takeaway from oral remarks,” writes one expert.

Let us expand upon the idea that committee members may leave before the Q&A commences. The fact is many will not show up at all, and your witness should not be disappointed by the plethora of empty seats. Also, be prepared for a series of distractions. Members will come and go. They may read unrelated material while the hearing is in progress. Staff will pass notes and whisper sweet nothings into the boss’ ear. Impress upon your witness that this hubbub of activity has nothing to do with them. Ignore it as much as possible. Continue to plug along with the oral statement and responses to questions.

Most committees give you no more than five minutes to state your case, so it is essential to advocate for your cause with punch and brevity. Your message must be up front, bold, and in bright lights so that members of Congress, your stakeholders, and your opponents know without question where you stand.

“Deliver your primary messages in the oral statement, and then expand on them in the written testimony,” says Tom McMahon. “The record usually doesn’t have space limitations, and witnesses can also submit additional materials, such as studies or news articles, to support their testimony.”

He adds, “The oral statement is like giving a speech. The written testimony is similar to a report.”

Put the boring facts in the written testimony, not in your oral statement.

Another respondent echoes, “The written testimony should capture every point you would like to make along with supporting evidence, background and examples. The oral statement should capture your key points in a compelling way, but also should be mindful of the five-minute time limit that the committee will likely impose on your oral statement.”

Some executives look at me funny when I mention that there are audiences beyond the four walls of the hearing room. The fact is you are telegraphing your public policy stance to other observers, too. Your customers, employees, or members need to know that you are fighting for their rights when testifying. Additionally, those who oppose you should be put on alert that you have no plans to back down from your core principles.

And don't forget about the Fourth Estate. Make sure your communications staff delivers not only a news release, but also your oral statement to [reporters](#) covering the issue at hand, and that they broadcast it through digital media channels. You may also want to distribute your written testimony to certain journalists who cover your beat in depth. Just do so judiciously so as not to stress out already overburdened reporters. Michael Hogan of the Alpine Group explains it as follows: "Written testimony is for policy details and for staff. Oral testimony is to win over the committee members and press to your side."

What procedures do you follow when drafting the oral statement?

Once upon a time, I led the communications shop at a large national association. Upon arriving, I noticed that our oral testimony was dry and desultory. The reason? The verbiage was lifted straight from the written testimony. Bad move.

Why? The formal document is written for the eye. The oral statement is written for the ear.

So we struck a bargain. The lawyers and issue experts took the first crack at the written submission. With that in hand, we in the communications department began drafting the five-minute oral statement. Our system worked out seamlessly since everyone had a defined role doing what they do best. The technical folks dealt with the intricate details while the communicators made it sing. After all, your communications staff should house your best writers (hint: If that is not the case, get rid of them and recalibrate your hiring process to ensure you bring on board talented writers as part of your communications crew).

The proclivities of your witness should also be taken into consideration. "The actual written and verbal testimony has to be written with clear goals in mind and very aware of the personality of the individual delivering the remarks," recommends one of our experts.

The presidency of Gerald Ford in the 1970s provides an excellent example of how to detour around roadblocks your witness may erect. When reading the word judgement, Ford would routinely pronounce it "judge-uh-ment." It was cringeworthy to hear and no doubt left his speechwriters grinding their teeth. What did they do? Simple. They stopped using that

word in his texts. Problem solved. The main point here: Know your witnesses and understand the steps you can take to put them in the best possible light.

In basic terms, “I think about the key points I want to make and then add supporting information accordingly” advises one respondent.

Bottom line, adds another, “I think about what I can say that will keep MCs (members of Congress) and the media paying attention.” This notion of also playing to the press is important. Remember, there are multiple audiences beyond the Congressional committee members, so consider how your words and ideas will motivate them, too.

Who make the best witnesses?

Some organizations put their best technicians front and center during Congressional testimony. I strongly suggest rethinking that strategy.

You need your best verbal (and nonverbal) communicator at the witness table. Says one of the survey respondents, “Those who are at ease with public speaking, and likable” make great witnesses. In the happiest of worlds, your issue expert possesses the qualities of a sound spokesperson. In the real world, that is often not the case.

Tom McMahon takes it one step further, suggesting “someone who is a recognized expert in their field and has excellent [presentation and listening skills](#).” Those listening skills come into play especially during the question and answer phase.

People with real life experience who have been affected by the issue being discussed can have an impact.

How can you create that perfect mixture? The fact is the top brass is unlikely to know all the details about the specific issue at hand. Yes, they should be familiar with the larger picture, but someone at that level has too many balls in the air to know every single fact. The solution? Back them up while testifying.

Here’s how you do that. The row of seats in the gallery immediately behind the witness table is normally reserved for guests of the witness. Your foremost issue experts should populate those seats. Should any geeky technical questions arise, they will be able to pass a

note or whisper into your witness' ear. A word to the wise: Rely on this method sparingly. Use it only when questions of a very narrow nature are posed. Lean on it too much and your star witness will appear ill-informed.

In some cases, organizations turn to celebrities or victims affected personally by the issue. This can work, but be forewarned that both types of spokespeople come with their own set of warning flags.

Celebrities are known for being difficult to deal with at times. While having a big name can help shine a light on your stance, you want a luminary who plays well with others and takes instruction well. Prima donnas will cause you no end of headaches — going off script, paying more attention to their own fame than to your issue and, in the end, sabotaging your public policy efforts.

“People with real life experience who have been affected by the issue, situation and/or the law(s) being discussed,” can have an impact, explains one of our experts. Nonetheless, everyday folks who have been affected in a real world sense also pose certain hurdles. While in some cases they are most eloquent, in others they mumble and fumble and do themselves — and you — little good. They also need to have the bigger picture in mind. Sure, they should tell their personal tale of woe. At the same time, they need to be able to link it to the broader issue the committee is deliberating.

In sum, you are seeking “people who are both knowledgeable on the topic but also have a good personality,” says one respondent.

You'll score bonus points with some committee members by turning to someone from back home. In the words of one expert, “It helps if the witness is a constituent or from the home state of the chair, ranking member, or one of the committee members.”

Not to put too fine a point on it, “People influential with voters or voting blocs,” as one respondent calls them, are certain to gain the attention of members of Congress.

Michael Hogan also suggests highlighting “those with the most public support. Also former members of Congress.” This last category, ex-members of “the club,” is not to be taken lightly. Members of Congress generally have great respect for and will give much leeway to past colleagues.

One last idea: It never hurts to seek input. “If you are trying to be included in a hearing, ask staff what type of witness they would like and offer that,” offers one wise authority.

What specific steps do you take to prepare a witness for delivering the oral statement?

As noted earlier, my clients receive a three-word mantra as we prepare them to communicate in public: Practice! Practice! Practice! And several of the survey respondents concur.

There is no substitute for rehearsals — and please note the plural form of the word. One run-through is not enough. It is imperative to give your witnesses the comfort of knowing their remarks cold and in applying the communications skills needed to get the job done right.

This means holding several dry runs whether you appear in the committee room or on video. The specific number depends on many factors. For example, have they testified previously? Are they already an accomplished communicator or do they need extra work in that department? How complex is the issue involved? Is this a new issue for you or have you been working it for years? Is this your company's number one priority? How many champions (or adversaries) do you count among the committee's members?

Make it a point during your preparations to “talk through the plan for the hearing,” advises one of our panel of experts. “Talk through the list of committee members and their particular interest in the issue — if they have shown interest.” Yes, be prepared for the fact that not all members of Congress care about what you have to say.

As part of that discussion, says another, “Walk them through the logistics of the day so that there are no surprises if we can help it.”

The physical appearance of your text also matters. Here's how you can make life easier for a Congressional witness. On the copy they read:

- Limit the text to the top two-thirds of the page. That way, they avoid looking down which risks reducing both eye contact and vocal capabilities.
- Sit forward in the chair, in what amounts to a starter's position. Don't lean back; that's too comfortable and will throw your voice off microphone.

How complex is the issue involved? Is this a new issue for you or have you been working it for years? Is this your company's number one priority?

- Place forearms on the table. This allows for use of hand gestures (if they normally do so) while also giving the hands a natural and comfortable resting place.
- Include page numbers in the upper right corner of each page. This makes it easier to get them back in order if necessary.
- Attach the pages of their statement with a paper clip, not a staple. This allows them to effortlessly dispatch each page when finished with it.
- Task someone accompanying your witness with carrying a second, stapled copy. If the first copy is blown away by a sudden gust from an errant cooling vent or soaked with a spilled glass of water, you're ready with a reserve text.

The more challenges you face — whether related to the complexity of the issue, the makeup of the Congressional committee, or a challenged witness — the more rehearsal time you must devote. And these must be formal run-throughs with no corner cutting allowed. I'll discuss in a few moments how to organize your training program.

What specific steps do you take to steel a witness for the Q&A with lawmakers?

The question and answer session is what often separates the pros from the wannabes when testifying on the Hill. Let's face it, it is much easier to rehearse a five-minute speech than to suffer the slings and arrows from members of Congress. They do this for a living nearly every day they are in session. The typical witness does not. Thus, steeling oneself to respond to questions must be high on your [testimony training](#) agenda.

Your first thought upon hearing this may be, "That's just dandy. My CEO has a lot of stellar qualities, but spur of the moment thinking is not high on the list." That's why it is advisable to hold several sessions devoted strictly to the question and answer period (for advice on helpful Q&A techniques, reference ["Does Anybody Have Any Questions for My Answers: The 411 on Q&A."](#))

During your run-throughs, "Remind [the witness] of key points you want to make and what you want the members of Congress to take away," one respondent recommends. And never lead with your chin. "It's important to tell your witness to avoid certain issues — if

there are items you don't want to be brought up at the hearing." As I frame it for my clients, don't open any doors you don't want a member of Congress to charge through.

This expert also suggests that you "talk through key points to raise and reiterate, and talk through possible questions that may arise. To better anticipate potential questions, I like to sort them into three baskets:

1. Routine questions that arise in nearly every forum in which you discuss this issue.
2. Friendly questions you want to hear. These are queries of the type you'll supply to Congressional staff in advance.
3. Challenging questions you never want to hear pass the lips of a committee member. Beware of these, and study strategies for handling them deftly.

Should hostile questions arise, reply to the barrage with long, expansive answers. Why? In most cases, legislators are on the clock. Why give them more time to nail your witness to the wall? Just be prepared for the fact that they may try to cut the answers short if they get wise to this tactic. They've played this game many times before.

When it comes to hardball subjects, Michael Hogan suggests creating a "murder board." Permit me one moment to discuss the term murder board. It was supposedly coined by the military (which has a marvelous capability and commitment when it comes to communications training) several decades ago. It's a bit harsh for my tastes. I prefer to call this "The Third Degree." I find that it still gets across the seriousness of the situation while not frightening my clients.

Remind your witness that honesty is always the best policy, even when the heat gets turned up in the Congressional kitchen. "Be honest," says Renee Radcliff Sinclair. "If you don't know an answer, commit to getting back to them with a written response."

Caution your witness not to disappear during Q&A. The odds are they will be part of a panel, perhaps including some with whom you vehemently disagree. While they don't need to respond to every question, they should be prepared to give concise, message-oriented responses when opportunity arises.

As noted earlier, listening skills are crucial. "Listen carefully to the question," Sinclair continues. "I've heard so many people not answer the question, just because they didn't listen and misunderstood what was asked." On the other hand, not answering a particular question directly can be a good strategic move. Building a [verbal bridge](#) to deflect the inquiry is a time-honored communications technique.

Sinclair also counsels that witnesses “make eye contact with the person who asked the question when answering.” If the going gets rough, however, “Find a familiar face on the dais and go to it when you start to feel ‘squishy.’”

As with most endeavors that end well, preparation counts for a lot. When testifying, this includes advance outreach to committee staff. “Hopefully we have been able to work with

You are going to be ignored or you will be on the receiving end of a lot of stupid and irrelevant questions. You must be ready for the unexpected.

committee staff on the general idea of what questions will be asked,” one survey respondent reveals.

“Know the lawmakers’ pet interests,” says one expert. For example, does your company have a job-creating facility in one’s district? Perhaps a

personal tragedy related to your issue has befallen one of their family members. Or a climate change denying member has seen the light on the environmental issue you promote, giving you an unforeseen ally.

Far be it from anyone to imply that members of Congress are not on a constant quest for pure truth. Okay, now for the harsh realities: “You are going to be ignored or you will be on the receiving end of a lot of stupid and irrelevant questions,” warns one expert. “You must be ready for the unexpected.”

Witnesses are sometimes subjected to yes/no questions from lawmakers. This happens for one of two reasons: 1) The inquisitor is tight on time since they are generally limited to five minutes or 2) they want to get your company on the record agreeing or disagreeing with a loaded statement. How to handle such situations?

It is important to acknowledge that witnesses are at a disadvantage since committee members hold all the cards. Remember, they do this regularly so they know most of the tricks. Plus, you do not want to appear in any way disrespectful.

The best approach is try to squeeze in a three-second response before they cut you off (and make no mistake, they will cut you off). Politely and skillfully deflecting the yes or no response is often the best course of action since it avoids sticking your company with an unwanted public policy position. Once the member grasps that the witness does not plan to play into their hands, they are likely to move on and try to pressure other witnesses to fall prey to their Q&A games.

Taking a preemptive approach is also effective, notes another: “I also send potential questions and suggested responses” to committee staff ahead of time.

During my association days, we hired ex-members of Congress and ex-Capitol Hill staff as consultants to role play certain committee members during rehearsals for particularly important appearances. They knew their colleagues’ tendencies and temperaments, and therefore knew how to mimic their personalities. It really gave our witnesses a better sense of what types of questioning to expect from the dais.

Note that former House and Senate members do not come cheap, so you may want to take this tack only when the stakes are at their highest. In addition, make sure they actually know and have worked with the members of the committee you will be facing. You are paying for advisors who know the players intimately, not just someone with a fancy former title to their name.

*Talk about the importance of Congressional staff
in the testimony process.*

It is impossible to overestimate the importance of staff on Capitol Hill. These experts have the boss’ ear and are many times the true decision-makers. “They can either make you look good or embarrass you,” says one survey participant.

Another respondent labels Hill staff “almost as, if not more, important than the members themselves.” (Woe be to the staffer who ever says that to a member of Congress’s face; that would be a certain career killer).

Maintaining good relations with Capitol Hill staff can lead to better intelligence gathering by your company. “Previous conversations with staffers can indicate biases” on the part of members, says one respondent.

Let’s talk about the two types of staff you may encounter. Most executives are familiar with the personal staff of a member of Congress. These are the individuals who operate their office and can have a wide range of responsibilities, particularly on the House side. One legislative assistant, for example, may deal with issues related to transportation, military affairs,

and energy. Thanks to larger staffs, portfolios in Senate offices tend to be narrower with workers often focused on a single issue.

The second set of staff works for the committee. These workers tend to be more immersed in the specific issues under the committee’s purview. This is the group you are likely to work with before and after your testimony appearance.

Members of Congress rely heavily on their staffs out of necessity. Staff members “decide the witness list; they write the questions,” discloses one of our experts.

This notion is echoed by yet another, who says, “Congressional staff are helpful in preparing their Members of Congress for the hearing.”

This individual also notes that you are required to provide your written testimony to committee staff beforehand. “By

It’s important to tell your witness to avoid certain issues if there are items you don’t want brought up at the hearing. As I frame it for my clients, don’t open any doors you don’t want a member of Congress to charge through.

having testimony in advance, congressional staff are able to prepare questions and brief their bosses about your concerns and perspective. If possible, it can be helpful to have witnesses do a conference call with key committee staff in advance of the hearing as well.”

Members are tugged in many directions on any given day, popping in to a hearing by one committee hashing out a health care issue, then speeding directly to another panel working through education matters. As a result, they depend on staff to steer them appropriately.

Staff does not typically play an active role posing questions during the hearing itself, with the very occasional exception of the committee counsel. “They are most important before and after the testimony,” explains Michael Hogan, and can play an important role in helping to “see that follow-up goes your way.”

Even with all this power and respect, “They have very little control over what their bosses actually say during the course of the hearing,” writes one expert. Yes, representatives and senators do sometimes stray from the script and cause ulcers among the staff.

What does this mean for you? Ignore or denigrate Hill staff at your own peril. As noted above, the boss listens to them and leans on them for what can be a final decision on how to handle the particulars of any issue, including yours. Treat staff with utmost respect.

How do you organize the training session to prepare your witnesses?

It is mandatory that your witnesses undergo a thorough [testimony training program](#). There are no shortcuts to this preparation.

“If you’ve ever watched prep for a debate, it’s very similar,” says Renee Radcliff Sinclair. “Set up a room, make your witness wear a suit, sit them down in front of a microphone, have a panel with staged questions ready to do Q&A, then drill, drill, drill.” The notion of wearing proper attire during your run-throughs is important, for you want your rehearsals to parallel the real thing as closely as possible.

To bolster this point, advises another expert, “The more formal, the better — use your board room to recreate the hearing room [and] over prepare.”

“We set it up like a hearing. Have the witness deliver their testimony, and ask several staffers to sit in as members to ask questions and act like members. Then we provide feedback and do it again if needed,” adds another.

“I walk through the testimony and possible issues that may arise,” explains one respondent. “We also then talk about what to expect in terms of being introduced, possible questions, and possible interruptions (e.g. floor votes).”

“It’s helpful to include other members of the organization who have testified or prepared witnesses in the past to provide insight,” says Tom McMahon.

Let’s cover the five Ws (with one bonus “What if”) to help you better prepare:

- **What** should be on the program agenda?
 - Review of your message
 - Quick primer on verbal and nonverbal techniques
 - Numerous run-throughs of the oral statement
 - Video recording, playback, and critique of all exercises
 - Exhaustive Q&A prep, complete with staff and consultants portraying committee members
- **What if** you’re preparing to testify remotely?
 - Make sure your witness has adequate bandwidth so that they don’t fade in and out, or freeze on the hearing room screen.

- Run several practice sessions to ensure your witness is up to speed on the technology.
- Record the sessions, then play them back and critique, just as you would for an in person session.
- Counsel your witness on obtaining [quality audio and video](#). This includes presenting a professional looking background.
- **Who** should be in the room during the training sessions?
 - Your witness
 - Your senior government relations and communications staff
 - Issue experts who can help resolve technical questions
 - The consultant who leads the workshop
 - Videographer to record and play back your practice runs (your consultant should be able to supply this individual)
 - Important: Limit attendance only to those who have a legitimate purpose; no hangers-on or curiosity seekers allowed
- **When** should the training take place?
 - Ideally, a day or two before your appearance on Capitol Hill
 - Fly your witnesses into town a day early to give them time to adjust and get a good night's rest in advance of the training session
 - Before the formal workshop, connect with your witness by phone or video conference to unearth any issues you may need to confront
 - Furnish your witness with the latest oral statement draft and necessary background materials well in advance of your workshop
- **Where** is the best location to hold the program?
 - Washington, D.C., unless you testify remotely.
 - Your office conference room is fine, assuming it is big enough
 - If you need more space, secure a room in a conference facility or hotel
- **Why** bother will all this fuss?
 - You've got to take this seriously if you have any hope of attaining your public policy objectives

- Your witness is probably one of your top executives; do you really want to be the one responsible for embarrassing them in the high profile atmosphere of a Congressional hearing room?

A note about working with a consultant (in the interest of full disclosure, this is where my clients bring me into the picture): They should do most of the heavy lifting when it comes to organizing your training program. To be sure, they'll need to coordinate closely with you on scheduling, and to learn about your issues, your witness, and your public policy goals. Experienced consultants have done this before, so take advantage of that familiarity and expertise; you've got plenty of other duties to attend to.

How do your preparations differ when grooming a first-time witness vs. an experienced one?

“They don’t,” in the words of one survey respondent. Point taken, in that preparation needs to take place no matter the experience level of your witness. Yet there are differences in the approach to [preparation](#).

Testifying before Congress is a big deal. To reiterate, it is likely to be the most important business meeting in which you'll ever participate. Even the most experienced executives get a case of the shakes and sweats when seated at that witness table (if they don't, look out; a cavalier approach could well lead to a lackluster or arrogant performance). In that sense the novice and the experienced witness are on equal footing. Still, there is some value in having done this before — in knowing the legislative dance, experiencing the dazzling lights, and feeling three-feet tall when facing members of Congress seated on a dais looking down upon you.

“Experienced witnesses need little prep, just an update on policy news and dynamics on the committee,” says one of our expert survey takers. Allow me to add

No matter the experience or skill level of your witness, you still must organize a top-notch training program to fine tune your message, iron out any kinks in your witness' delivery, and rehearse for the all-important Q&A period.

a different twist. Message review, rehearsal time, and Q&A preparation all remain vital. Like snowflakes, each round of Congressional testimony is unique. Respect the process. Respect the members. Respect the committee. Don't cut corners when preparing your witness — unless your public policy goals just aren't that important to you. By no means am I alone in this belief. Other respondents concur.

For example, “A first-time witness requires more information on the logistics of the day and information on how a hearing runs, whereas an experienced witness is more likely to need to practice the Q&A portion only,” opines another respondent.

As one expert phrases it, veteran witnesses “are more comfortable with the process and issues so they generally don't need as much basic preparation.”

Tom McMahon agrees: “More time is needed to prepare a witness who is testifying for the first-time. Nonetheless, it's important that experienced witnesses also contribute to the message development and take the time to rehearse.”

Adds one government relations executive, “First timers need to understand that different Congressmen will react differently and that what is a positive with one may be a negative with another.”

Michael Hogan takes it a step farther. “For first-timers, I take them to the hearing room and meet with members prior, then brief them on the broad issue, political considerations for members, and the goal we seek to achieve.”

The fact remains that, regardless of the experience or skill level of your witness, you still must organize a top-notch training program to fine tune your message, iron out any kinks in your witness' delivery, and rehearse for the all-important [Q&A period](#).

Walk me through the steps you tell witnesses to take when they first arrive on Capitol Hill.

Your advance preparations, including your training agenda, should stand you in good stead. Still, when your witness first arrives on Capitol Hill, it is likely to be a lump-in-the-throat experience for them. It's intimidating. In fact, if your witness isn't a little bit shaky, they are either in denial or evidencing a huge and harmful dose of hubris.

The first order of business is to arrive early. Security regimens being what they are, it can take a while to gain clearance into your House or Senate office building. There are few more nerve-inducing events than running late for a Congressional testimony appearance, so give yourself plenty of extra time.

When planning your trip to the Hill, back time everything. For example, if your testimony is scheduled for 10 a.m., plan to arrive there no later than 9:30. If it's a 15-minute taxi ride from your office or hotel to the Hill, that means you leave at 9:15. If you plan on a final preparatory breakfast, allow for that. And so on. Also of importance, build in some extra time. As with anything in business, unexpected events have a way of popping up, so give yourself some wiggle room in order to avoid a nerve-jangling experience.

“I generally meet the witness for breakfast and then arrange to get to the Hill with him/her. This takes the worry out of the witness figuring out where to go,” adds one individual, “and it gives them the opportunity to talk through their concerns, questions, fears, etc.” One note about breakfast. Gauge your witness' morning preferences. While a healthy breakfast is a good idea — no sense in your witness appearing with an empty fuel tank — a big meal is likely to leave them feeling logy. Additionally, some of us are morning people while others

Are You Wasting Time and Resources When You Testify?

How would you and your organization like to be invited to testify on Capitol Hill time after time? Think what that could do to strengthen your public policy efforts.

Add a debrief session to your next Barks testimony training program. Here's what you get:

- Preparation workshop that includes a mock hearing with plenty of Q&A practice.
- Ed attends your hearing.
- Rapid debrief on the Hill immediately following your testimony.
- Comprehensive debrief the day after your testimony.

It doesn't take long for memories to grow stale and unreliable. Your debrief program ensures that you capture what worked, what didn't, and how you can use today's testimony as a model for future successes.

Call Ed at (703) 533-0403 to reserve your debrief session

don't get up to speed until later in the day. Ask your witness about their normal routine and adhere to that as much as possible.

Renee Radcliff Sinclair recommends that witnesses and their advisors “Walk around the building a little bit to get a ‘feel’ for the environment,” and to “Familiarize yourself with the room you will be testifying in.”

As I advise my clients, it helps to [“take ownership”](#) of any room where they speak. It can be a real confidence builder.

You are likely to be directed to check in at the committee staff room. Upon entering, be gracious. One survey respondent reminds us that it is a good idea to “introduce [yourself] to the other witnesses, congressional staff, and members” (though members may not arrive until the last moment).

“Look over other witness testimony briefly,” counsels Michael Hogan, and “use the restroom.” I cannot tell you the number of weird looks I've gotten over the years when offering this guidance. But they always thank me later.

“Remain calm,” says one respondent. For some witnesses, especially first-timers, this may be easier said than done. The point here is to know your witness well enough to understand what techniques may have calming influences.

Finally, reminds Tom McMahan, “relax, hearings happen all of the time.” Of course, while too much of a relaxed attitude isn't advised, worrying oneself to the point of hypertension is no good either. And as McMahan points out, this hearing is probably a bigger deal to you than to a member of Congress, who participates in such meetings regularly, so keep some perspective.

When planning your trip to the Hill, back time everything. As with anything in business, unexpected events have a way of popping up, so give yourself some wiggle room in order to avoid a nerve-jangling experience.

Once the testimony is complete, what follow up steps are most valuable?

There are two follow up phases. First comes your liaison with people from outside your organization. Upon conclusion of your testimony appearance, shake hands and exchange a few words with committee members who stay until the end. This is a crucial step in your relationship building process. Next, do the same with Congressional staff. Remember, these are the folks who you are likely to be in contact with more regularly. Finally, don't ignore your fellow witnesses, be they friend or foe. This helps you strengthen relationships with like-minded groups while potentially easing tensions with those who oppose you. Plus, you never know when today's foe may become tomorrow's ally.

Also remember to send thank you notes to committee members and staff. Traditional mail is a good idea as there is nothing like a handwritten note. Realize, however, that it will take several weeks to arrive in the designated Congressional office since all mail is screened offsite. The best course: Go ahead and send that thank you note via surface mail. But before sending it, scan it, and email it to the member or staffer. That gets it there in timely fashion while still maintaining at least some degree of personal touch.

Work with your media staff to promote your Capitol Hill appearance.

What should your note say? "Send a letter to the chairman with cc's to all members thanking him/her for allowing you time to present and reviewing the three points you made in your testimony," says Renee Radcliff Sinclair. "Send a different letter to the lead staffer with cc's to other relevant staffers, but with basically the same message."

And yes, these thank yous are important "No matter how you were received," points out one respondent.

Second comes the business part of your follow up. The committee may well have posed questions for which you had no ready answer (don't be embarrassed, this is routine; just be sure the questions revolve around specific, technical issues and not your broader message). So remember, in the words of one expert surveyed, to "follow up on questions asked that the witness wasn't able to answer or that we would like to clarify further in writing."

Be sure to “Answer all additional follow-ups in a timely manner,” reminds another.

Hold on a moment. You’re not done yet. “Share the written testimony via email to all [concerned] staff and offer yourself as a resource for additional Q&A,” urges another of our experts. After all, some may have missed the hearing due to conflicting commitments. And others may need a gentle reminder of your views.

One respondent points out the importance of “work(ing) with our media team to promote the testimony.” Reporters have scheduling conflicts, too, so be sure to send your oral statement to scribes who cover your issues. Of course, you will have contacted them in advance to alert them to your appearance on the Hill in an effort to gin up as much coverage as possible.

Also mention your testimony — and quote from it — when your executives [deliver presentations](#) (“As I told Congress...” has a nice ring to it). This not only provides powerful, message-driven material; as one who has testified on Capitol Hill, it establishes you as a credible authority with your audience.

What steps do you take to debrief your witness and your government relations staff?

It is vital that you begin the debrief process immediately following your performance. This won’t be the full soup to nuts review you’ll conduct later, but you do need to take note of your initial impressions about what worked, what you can do better next time, and what tasks you need to carry out going forward.

A word of caution: Find a quiet corner well away from prying eyes and ears. Your strategy is too important. Don’t assume that young person walking down the hall or sitting at the next cafeteria table is of no consequence. They may turn out to be an intern in the committee chairman’s office, fully capable of reporting your internal deliberations back to the boss.

What happens once you depart Capitol Hill? Schedule some time on your calendar for a follow up meeting. In fact, set a firm date and time during your advance preparations so that

it gets on everyone's schedule ahead of time. One of our survey takers suggests "an in-person debrief right after [the testimony] over lunch."

Of course, your witness may be headed back home immediately after testifying, so they may need to participate via video conference. That's fine. Regardless, you must mandate that they be an integral part of your debrief.

Your debrief meeting agenda should focus on three basic areas:

1. What worked, and how can we model that for use again in the future?
2. What could we have done better, and how can we sharpen that aspect next time?
3. What follow up steps do we still need to take, who is assigned to which tasks, and what are our deadlines (e.g., responding in writing to members' questions for the record, arranging follow up meetings with key Hill staff, pitching reporters on the results of your testimony)?

Let's talk about some specifics you should consider as part of this process. First, work in a discussion of "the other witness testimony [and] the members' lines of questioning," says Michael Hogan.

How can you use today's testimony as a learning experience for tomorrow? Ask yourselves the really tough and sometimes discomfiting questions.

"Review the questions that were asked of the witness and others that testified," reminds Tom McMahon. "See if there's a reason to schedule a follow-up meeting with the member or staff to provide additional information or discuss other ways the witness could be helpful."

Also, "A download of impressions from staff, myself, and the witness is necessary, as well as any feedback from staff or members is essential," according to one public policy expert.

And this reminder from Renee Radcliff Sinclair: Turn to your witness to assess "What did he/she feel good about? What could he/she have done better? How did he/she feel about the 'vibe' in the room and the messages from committee members?"

The importance of your debriefing cannot be overstated. You must commit 100 percent to the debriefing route if you hope to better your public policy results over the long haul.

How do you use today's round of testimony to get better when you testify tomorrow?

Some organizations — far too many in my experience — make themselves victims of lost opportunity when it comes to testifying on Capitol Hill. At the conclusion of the event, they heave a sigh of relief, put it behind them, then scramble on to the next panic attack.

On the other hand, the organizations that seem to come out on top time after time are the ones that devote energy and effort to learning from their successes and their mistakes at the witness table.

Your next Congressional testimony opportunity may well depend upon the relationships you build over time. Cultivate these relationships with care. “If you’ve properly built rapport with members, do follow-up visits so you’ll be invited to testify in the future,” urges Michael Hogan.

Modeling today’s testimony to benefit tomorrow’s should be par for the course. Says one respondent, “We can pull from ‘best practices,’ see what people best responded to, and take out anything that maybe didn’t play as well. We can also make responses to questions stronger depending on how it went.”

This research discovered a troubling note with regard to the importance of past testimony review. The last two questions posed in our survey dealt with assessing feedback (for a more complete treatment of this issue, see [“Assessing Feedback: The Surefire Way to Achieve Your Professional Goals”](#)). Those queries were skipped by more respondents than any others. Could it mean that debriefing efforts and attention to improvement over time are given short shrift? More research is needed before offering a definitive conclusion. It does, however, bear monitoring as this would be a most troubling sign. Be sure not to let your organization and your witness fall victim to this failure.

With that said, how can you use today’s testimony as a learning experience for tomorrow? Rule number one is to ask yourselves the really tough and sometimes discomfiting questions. Consider these specifics:

- Were our advance preparations good enough?
- Was our witness’ performance up to par or do we need to look for someone else next time?

- Did our government relations department put together an airtight case?
- Was our communications staff up to the job of crafting the oral statement?
- How did we do at building relationships with key members of Congress and their staffs?
- What are our allies and opponents saying about us now?
- How was our reputation aided (or hindered) by our appearance?
- Did we pay enough attention to debriefing our performance so that we can do better the next time?

Yes, these questions may cause some of your troops to squirm. Some of them may verge on painful, but think of it this way: Would you rather inflict a little anxiety in the short term or subject your company to a reputational hit from which it may take years to recover?

Closing Statement

Forget about delivering a speech with your most important audience in the hall. Never mind that CNBC interview you've been pursuing for months. Put out of your mind that pitch to potential funders of your business.

To be sure, those are all important milestones. Yet the most important business meeting you are ever likely to attend occurs when you testify before a Congressional committee.

You have a scant five minutes to plead your case, so you'd best make the most of it if you hope to reach your public policy objectives. Your presentation at the witness table and skill at navigating the Q&A session can make or break your reputation and that of your company, to say nothing of the business opportunities you stand to gain or lose. Once gone, a clean reputation is difficult if not impossible to regain.

And remember one of the key findings of this research: You can put yourself miles ahead of your rivals by debriefing your performance. Relatively few government relations experts devote time to doing so — strange since that helps ramp up future odds for success in Capitol Hill hearing rooms. Your long-run victory and achievement of your overall public affairs goals depend on it.

Prepare, perform, and debrief. Picture in your mind all the corporate titans and issues experts who have appeared before Congress only to leave with their heads hung low. Don't let that be you.

It is my sincere hope that this research report — thanks to the participation of our expert survey respondents — has blazed a path to public policy success for you and your company. The report unearthed research revealing:

- Traits that successful witnesses follow
- How to organize an effective training program
- The importance of the oral statement (and advice for how to write it)
- How to follow up with members of Congress and their staffs

I invite you contact me and share your tales of success the next time you prepare to take that pivotal seat at the Congressional witness table. You may even see yourself quoted in a future update.

Congressional Testimony at a Glance

Here's a quick reference guide to remind you of the basics. Congressional hearings directly impact laws and regulations that can make or break your enterprise. Remember: It's the most important business meeting you'll ever have. You are granted a scant five minutes to deliver your message, so take advantage of the Five Minute Approach to help you achieve your public policy objectives:

1. **Perfect your oral statement during your practice sessions** to ascertain that both your message and your timing at the witness table are solid.
2. **Take plenty of time to frame key messages.** What you develop in these messaging sessions not only forms the core of your oral statement, but serves as your anchor during Q&A.
3. **Insist that your communications staff write your oral statement.** They should be skilled at weaving a coherent message and at writing for the ear.
4. **Stage a mock hearing program** to infuse your witness with your message and to provide a needed shot of confidence.
5. **Treat members of Congress with due deference.** At the same time, refuse to be intimidated.
6. **Never speak off the cuff.** You worked long and hard on that oral statement in order to nail your five-minute time limit.
7. **Use your main message points** in response to every question lawmakers toss your way.
8. **If you testify via remote video conference,** be sure to concentrate on that aspect as part of your preparations.
9. **Leverage your testimony after your appearance.** Broadcast your message through the traditional media, digital media, executive speeches, and other public forums.
10. **Regularly update committee members,** committee and personal staff, and key constituency groups.
11. **Send thank you notes** to the chair, ranking member, any home state members, and other key lawmakers. Courtesy counts.

About the Author

Author and communications strategy consultant **Ed Barks** works with communications and government relations executives who counsel their C-suite leaders, and with businesses and associations that need their communications strategy and messaging to deliver bottom line results. They gain an enhanced reputation, greater confidence, more opportunities for career advancement, and achievement of long-term business and public policy goals.

He is the **author of [four business books](#)**:

- *Insider Strategies for the Confident Communicator: How to Master Meetings, Presentations, Interviews, and Advocacy*
- *Reporters Don't Hate You: 100+ Amazing Media Relations Strategies*
- *A+ Strategies for C-Suite Communications: Turning Today's Leaders into Tomorrow's Influencers*
- *The Truth About Public Speaking: The Three Keys to Great Presentations*

Ed contributes to a variety of publications and is the former “Speaking Sense” columnist for the *Washington Business Journal*. He has also published numerous research reports and position papers, including **[“A Buyer’s Guide To Communications Strategy Consultants.”](#)**

More than 5700 business leaders, association executives, scientists, government officials, entertainers, and other thought leaders thank Ed for sharpening their communications edge.

According to his clients, he “knows how to elicit peak performance.” They call him “a master at connecting with his audience” and “an effective educator,” and give his communications training workshops “two thumbs up!”

He has served as President of Barks Communications since founding it in 1997. He served a nine-year tenure on the Board of Governors of the **National Press Club** and joined the faculty of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Institute for Organization Management. He is a former member of the board of directors of the Institute of Management Consultants National Capital Region, and the Consultants Section Council of the American Society of Association Executives (ASAE).

An inside-the-Beltway veteran, Ed has spent more than three decades in Washington, D.C. He brings another critical perspective to his clients’ communications needs — that of a broadcaster and journalist. He knows firsthand the traits and techniques of the reporting trade, thanks to a decade of experience in radio broadcasting.

Ed also publishes the **C-suite Blueprint blog**. [Follow him there](#) to receive notification of each post.

