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# ***How to Become your Company's Foreign Minister***

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# How to Become your Company's Foreign Minister

When I was a US Ambassador seeking to maximize ways that I could influence the host government in the country to which I was posted, **I focused on three things:**

1. Establishing close personal relations and trust with the key officials of importance to our interests
2. Establishing the same close relations with persons who have influence on government policy and thinking
3. Establishing a public reputation as an active US representative and player

# Establish Relationships: Key Officials

**Establishing close personal relations and trust with the key officials of importance to our interests**

- Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Defense, Trade, Finance, Energy, Agriculture, Environment
- Key officials in the President's office
- Key members of the Legislature: the Speaker and heads of relevant Committees

Once trust was established, I could count on them taking my calls or agreeing to see a visiting USG official.

# Establish Relationships:

## Influencers on Government Policy

**Establishing the same close relations with persons who have influence on government policy and thinking.** Sometimes, it is helpful to reinforce policies and USG positions with such persons, since they can be helpful proxies.

- The heads of key political parties – both those in office and opposition
- Key editors of major newspapers; owners of TV stations
- Prominent businesspeople who might be part of an informal “Kitchen Cabinet” of the President or Prime Minister

# Establish Public Reputation

**Establishing a public reputation as an active US representative and player, but also a friend of the country who wanted win-wins for the US and host country.**

- I traveled and did a lot of press to show my respect for and interest in the country and its people
- Likewise, I attended national cultural performances and tweeted out my positive reactions
- I was careful, at least in the first six months, not to criticize publicly the President and his key Ministers
- If I did need to say something critical, I called key interlocutors first to explain why so they would not be blind-sided

# Advice for Companies

Companies looking to establish a successful and influential Government Affairs operation in a foreign country should follow a similar track:

**Your firm's senior management in country should get to know the key host government officials** who matter in the regulation of your product or service. **Don't wait for a crisis – that will be too late**, and they may not see you.

The level of whom you should try to see depends on several factors:

- The size of your investment and the number of local employees
- The size of the country – in a country like India, it is very hard to meet Ministers, whereas in a country like Nepal with few foreign investors, Ministers would be more accessible

# Advice for Companies

**In initial courtesy calls, be sure to tell them the details of your company they care about:**

- How long your company has operated in the country
- The size of your investment and any plans for new investments
- The number of locals you employ
- How much tax revenue your company pays to the Government

**Think of creative ways to involve Ministers or senior officials:**

- If you are announcing a new investment or opening a new plant, be sure to invite not only the relevant national Ministers but also local officials: the Mayor, the Governor, local Members of Parliament; and give them each short speaking roles so they can take some credit with their constituents (but also be available if you need them in the future)
- If you are organizing a roundtable, invite the relevant Minister(s) to join and make a presentation
- Send key officials copies of interesting studies that can help them look smart with their bosses and add a short personal note of your own

# Advice for Companies

**Pay a courtesy call on the key members of the US Embassy** whom you will need:

- **US Ambassador and the Deputy Chief of Mission** (when the Ambassador is out of the country or unavailable) – for help with advocacy; to meet visiting senior officials of your company; or attend a plant opening.
- **The heads of the Economic, Commercial and (if appropriate) Agricultural, Agency for International Development Sections.**
- **The Regional Security Officer:** he or she is responsible for the security of official and non-official Americans; Overseas Advisory Committee to advise US companies about security issues in most countries
- **The Consul General:** the Consular Section is responsible for immigrant and non-immigrant visas and for maintaining the warden system which provides security alerts about security threats to all American citizens (make sure all your American employees register with the Consular Section)
- **The Public Affairs (PA) Counselor:** the PA sections are always looking for programming ideas that serve US interests, one of which is to promote US exports. They are usually open to suggestions that can showcase either how your company is helping address a national problem like counterfeiting of medicines or pesticides, or how your CSR program is helping improve say literacy or maternal health.
  - Be sure to include a host government official to improve your relations with and access to that

***One caveat:** in some countries where US relations with the host country are poor, think carefully about whether it is useful to include USG officials at your events. It may not be!*

# Advice for Companies

## **Use your company's Corporate Social Responsibility program strategically**

- Figure out programs that both respond to host government priorities and showcase your company's products and services
- Invite senior government, state and municipal officials to participate in CSR events to help build your relations with them, benefit from the press they themselves will generate, and highlight your company's contribution to solving the problem

# Advice for Companies

## **How to develop a good public affairs operation for your company**

- Develop your in-house public affairs capability, particularly if you are a large company with a local office.
- Hire locals who speak the local language and have a good range of media contacts
- Develop a database of knowledgeable TV and print journalists who write and comment on your issues, and send them company press releases, background information on public policy issues and offer your staff as subject matter experts for print and TV
- Make sure you have a local staffer with expertise in the local social media landscape and knows which platforms are the most widely read by which of your target audiences. Use those platforms to circulate your company's press releases that might be of interest; use Twitter and other platforms as appropriate to comment on interesting press stories or to share stories from the foreign press. This can establish you as a thought leader in the country in which you operate.
- Think out of the box about how to reach key audiences: if your target audience is young people, think about appearing on a variety show that has high ratings with them

# Advice for Companies

**Develop a map of and get to know other key stakeholders who can help your company and be integrated into your programs**

- Prominent OpEd writers that write about your issues
- Key leaders of think tanks that write about your economic sector(s)
- Leaders with large social media presence who could reinforce your message

These stakeholders can reinforce your policy issues, host discussions for senior leaders of your company when they visit, or attend a lunch or dinner with community leaders you may wish to organize