
Your Bottom Line

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Get involved

Individuals who become actively involved in government politics and professional organizations can influence laws and administrative decisions affecting their lives. Unfortunately, many photographers are so involved with trivial, day-to-day problems of operating photography studios, they neglect to make time for important political issues. Although a lack of involvement may not affect individuals directly, it can have devastating effects on business owners in the long run.

Because we live in a democratic society, individuals have the right and responsibility to communicate their ideas and grievances to government and professional association representatives. They even have the right to run for government office themselves, if they so choose.

I frequently hear photographers complain about professional organization policies, yet many fail to discuss important issues with association leaders. Consequently, the organization does not always reflect their values. Photographers must realize that association leaders, as well as local, state, and federal government officials, can not resolve problems if individuals neglect to communicate them.

When is the last time you attended a school board or city council meeting? Do you even know who your elected representatives are? Do they know who you are? How can individuals who do not fulfill their civic responsibilities expect leaders to effectively represent them?

For years, I was "too busy" to become involved with governmental issues. I began to recognize the importance of trying to change policies I consider unjust after my company had a run-in with the Federal Wage and Hour Office. A former employee filed a complaint stating he was not properly paid for overtime. Although the investigation was dismissed once it was proved that the individual did not qualify for overtime, it would have been easy to grumble and forget about the issue. But this event made me aware that I had a civic duty to help overturn unfair government policies.

As a result, I made it my business to

communicate my feelings to influential government representatives by initiating a letter-writing campaign. I also educated small business owners about the situation. To bring a matter to public attention, individuals can also write letters to publication editors and develop news stories.

Can one small business owner bring about change? You bet. It isn't easy, and it doesn't happen overnight, but it does happen. For example, on a Massachusetts state income tax return, I noticed a conspicuously placed check-off box where individuals can indicate a desire to make a deductible donation to AIDS research. Since there were no check-off boxes for cancer or heart disease research donations, it appears that people with special interests in cancer and heart disease have not taken as active a role in pushing their aims through the political process as the AIDS Foundation leaders. This situation indicates how the political system can work for dedicated members of the community who seek results.

Even if you don't have an ax to grind, it is worthwhile to join professional organizations and participate in their programs and administrative operations. Become active in political groups, or at least acquaint yourself with the political process in your area. Get to know your political officials and invite them to speak at professional association events, or ask them to visit your studio to exchange information regarding future goals.

Although political and organizational activism may not result in immediate benefits to your bottom line, it can contribute to the most important bottom line of all—the future of the profession of photography and independently owned small businesses. 