



# THE MIDWIFERY COALITION OF NOVA SCOTIA

## Understanding Politicians and learning to think like them

Politicians are just like the rest of us? —NOT! Their job makes them look at the world differently than we do and make decisions in a very different way. Knowing how they think makes it easier to work with them and makes it easier to get them to do the things we want.

### Politicians live in the here and now

Do you know what you will be working on next week? Politicians don't. To stay flexible and free to respond to new events, they often don't plan more than a few days ahead (other than appearances at official events which must be scheduled in advance). They live in the present and think mostly about today's issues, today's newstories, today's decisions. They will think about smoking on the days that it is in the news—and forget about it on other days.

### Politicians want immediate rewards—and want to avoid immediate difficulties

Health workers plan for policy changes which will take effect over years or even generations. A politician plans for the next newspaper headline or the next meeting (and, of course, the next election). To motivate politicians to take action means finding an immediate, positive reward.

### Politicians are competitive

Everything is partisan to a politician. Don't expect them to want to "build agreement" or to work with members of other parties, or to share the limelight with you or anyone else. They live—and die—by publicity.

### Politicians want to be liked

Politicians need as many people as possible to approve of them. They don't like to say "no" to any request in case it creates enemies. There are two important lessons from this:

Always ask for something with which they can agree

In addition to asking for your big items (i.e. a ban on tobacco advertising), make sure you ask for something else that they may be able to support (i.e. programs in schools) or do (i.e. writing a letter in support of a program). That way you both walk away with a some-good feeling, and the door is left open for future talks

Listen carefully for "no"

If a politician can't say "yes" she may say "no" in a very quiet and subtle way. Even groups of politicians—like cabinets—will prefer to avoid saying "no." Instead of directly rejecting our ideas, they'll fail to take any action on them. As a rule of thumb, if they don't look you in the eye and say "yes" then the answer is "no."

### Politicians make "deals"

Politicians barter constantly with each other, and spend much of their time making "deals." They are quite comfortable trading off policy gains in one area against those in another. Tobacco is a special issue for us, and we might not be willing to trade it against a totally unrelated issue, but a politician will. A Minister of Health may agree to abandon tobacco control, for example, in return for more money for hospitals, or for a new public building in her or his city.

### Politicians think locally

Politicians feel a strong loyalty and responsibility for their communities. Don't expect them to care about the "big picture." They may willingly oppose controls on tobacco if they think it will hurt even a handful of local tobacco farmers or threaten only a few jobs in their community.