

5-Minute Handbook for Grassroots Activists

We've been a gun rights activist organization for over 20 years. We've spent a lot of time for the first few years learning the basic rules of politics because there wasn't a definitive rule book like the one you are now reading.

The next 5 minutes you spend reading this might save you 5 years of otherwise wasted time and energy. If you've been in the gun rights game for a while, this handbook will be the fastest refresher course you've ever taken.

This past year I've received a lot of mail from jittery gun owners who are finally waking up to what's happening to our right to keep and bear arms (RKBA). This handbook is mostly for them.

If the rules I list below scare off a few folks, so be it. I want to tell it like it really is to give a quick snapshot of the tips, tricks and tactics that actually work in RKBA activism.

The bad news is that this is not a complete list of the rules.

The good news is that there will never be a complete list of rules.

The rules listed below are based on our own experiences from working thousands of hours with down and dirty RKBA activist pros. We are deeply grateful to all of them. They know who they are.

Some of these rules have been followed for so long by old-time activists that they have forgotten what the original rules were.

It's time to list them again. And sneak in a couple of new ones. So read them and weep, or read them and rejoice.

No one is as interested as you are.

Nowadays everyone's attention span and time are limited. Be grateful if you get anyone's attention on our issue, even for a few seconds. Some wannabe activists come in even faster, then disappear faster. Take whatever you get from any volunteer. Praise and thank them. Don't be disappointed when they drift away. They will. But some come back. Keep the light on for them.

There is no magic bullet.

There is no single answer, rule, or solution. Never has been, and never will be. None of us will write the single brilliant letter to the editor or Internet message that will miraculously turn everything around. Keep steadily busy. Do as much as you can, whenever you can. Anything you do counts, but some things count more than others. Find out what counts. Then do it.

There is no final victory.

Preserving RKBA is an ongoing *process*. We are winning and losing battles during this process, but the war will never be over. Becoming active to keep your gun rights is a lot like cleaning your house: it's thankless and boring work, but necessary. Like dirt, the anti-gun crowd will just keep coming back. Forever. Your activism will keep us winning more than losing. Our opponents count on wearing us down. They love it when one of us (not you, of course) gets discouraged and drops out. When you fully understand and accept the reality that RKBA is a never-ending struggle, you're automatically in the top 5 percent of all RKBA defenders. Congratulations.

RKBA activism is boring.

It's especially boring when you are doing things that really make a difference. Most of us want drama. We want to be entertained. Phone bank calling, precinct walking, going to RKBA grassroots seminars — suddenly, even a trip to the dentist for a root canal will start to look better. Sorry, but there is no workaround on this aspect. Freedom is not free. It's a pain in the ass. Get used to it, get over it, and get to work.

Use the power of fear and guilt.

Gun owners are susceptible to these emotions. Awaken sleeping RKBA activists by tapping these powerful emotions. Fear and guilt will move mountains — and fill the collection plate, and recruit new members. If gun owners won't become active for themselves, ask them to do it for their families. For their children. For their country. And — this tactic works! — ask them to do it for *you*.

Watch out for misdirected, time-wasting efforts.

E-mail to elected people should be used only as a last resort — unless the official already personally knows you. Focus on the stuff that works. If you're going to hunt ducks, go where the ducks are. (E-mail is a *lot* better than nothing. If your only choice between doing e-mail and doing nothing, by all means, send e-mail to legislators!)

Politicians only care about votes and money.

In-person visits, phone calls, and snail-mailed, handwritten letters to elected folks help — because politicians know that if you take this much trouble, you and your family and friends will also vote.

HOT TIP:

Make yourself known to politicians for issues other than gun rights. Don't present yourself as a single-issue person. Praise and help politicians on *their* pet projects. Then, when a new gun control law comes up, your opinion will seem especially credible. Otherwise, you will soon be stereotyped and discounted as a single-issue voter.

Another HOT TIP:

Politicians have to explain why they vote Yes or No on proposed laws. Sometimes they really need your help in composing explanations to their constituents. If you want your elected official to vote No on a seemingly popular new gun control law, she might be more willing to vote your way if you give her a "back door" — a good, common sense explanation that she can give to all of her constituents.

Get the right people in office in the first place.

If we have the right people in power, anti-gun laws will not be passed. Period. The laws are what matter. This concept is so simple that many folks can't see it, just like they can't "see" the air they breathe. The anti-rights crowd can hold all the gun control seminars and news conferences they want, but nothing will happen unless they can pass more laws. This fact tells you about the how, what, where, when, why, and with whom you should be spending your time, energy, and money. Politicians pass laws. Therefore, you must get involved in politics to protect your gun rights. There is just no way to get around this. Sorry. I don't like politics either. Bummer!

Stop the saber rattling — NOW!

Avoid those shrill folks who sound threatening or talk about doomsday. It's a waste of your time. These noisy folks remind me of a couple in a failing marriage who only talk about a getting a divorce instead of talking about their real problems. If they don't solve their problems, separation or divorce becomes the inevitable outcome. Some people get pumped up on silly fantasy scenarios. I do not.

Arm yourself with accurate information.

Paradoxically, bad information or disinformation is a plague in the so-called Information Age. When you write or talk about firearms issues, use only the facts, the truth, and the provable. Verify any quotes that you use. Back up your generalizations with powerful and specific examples. Get on the Internet, and get your like-minded friends online. Join several of the net communities that will keep you informed instantly and completely about our special issues. Information is power!

Ignore media spin and the news waves.

It's far too easy to go bonkers reacting to the latest media-driven crisis. Don't let the media push your buttons. The RKBA grassroots pros I know do not overreact to crises. In fact, most of the ultra-pros that I know do not react at all to media hysteria. Bashing the media about their bias is not productive. Some gun owners use media bias as an excuse to do nothing — because the situation seems so overwhelming and hopeless. Truth is, if you are a busy activist — already steadily doing stuff that matters — you will find the media reacting to YOU. Be friendly and polite with them — not hostile. Become a reliable source of information for them. And just keep on being *active*.

JUST SHOW UP.

It's been said that 80 percent of success is showing up. Being there. Showing up to vote. Showing up at an RKBA seminar. At your legislator's office. At a city council meeting. My father's favorite motto: "Your actions speak so loud that I can't hear a word you're saying." Your "silent" activism can be a model for others. What will your 3 hunting buddies think when they find out you spent an afternoon handing out brochures door-to-door for a pro-gun politician?

Don't mess with true believers.

In the time you spend trying to convert one hard core anti-gun person to our side, you could have gone out and motivated and organized 20 people who already think like you do. Go with the flow. It's easier on your nerves, and much more effective. Personally, I have converted several anti-rights true believers, but never again! Lots of NRA members are not registered voters. A lot of gun owners aren't NRA members. Even more folks have no idea of their elected officials' positions on gun issues. Where is your time most effectively spent? Think about this before you spend an hour writing a clever response to a silly message you found somewhere on the Internet.

Simplicity still matters.

The old rule, Keep It Super Simple (KISS), is as important as it ever was. It applies to Internet postings, planning, speeches — everything. And keep it short. And keep it sweet: don't ever ridicule or insult anyone. Did you notice that I did *not* say, "Keep It Simple, *Stupid?*"

You are not alone.

Well, not quite alone. You do have some help. Firearms Owners Against Crime has a group of key volunteers who donate hours in the triple digits each week. There is no way humanly possible that we can put out all the brush fires started by the anti-rights crowd. Pro-gun national organizations give direction and information — but they cannot save your rights. **Only you can save your rights**. You are 100 percent responsible. When you fully accept this reality, you are automatically in the top one percent of all RKBA activists.

The hidden bonus of gun rights activism.

The more involved you get with firearms freedom, the more you will realize that your single issue actually complements and protects other human rights issues. Personally, I am deeply offended by many aspects of today's culture. When I focus my activism on RKBA, I can often sense I am making a measurable difference. All rights — like all humans — are connected.

When in doubt, just DO something.

Sometimes we don't know what will work. Sometimes the rule is that there are no rules. I once wrote an essay I thought was mediocre at best. Five years later, I'm still receiving mail about it. Don't hesitate to try something new and innovative — get it out on the table! Often your finest essay or brilliant letter will not be acknowledged, or you will just get a form letter response. But that letter to the editor that you dashed off in a few minutes appears in tomorrow's newspaper! Go figure. Better yet, try not to figure. Trust yourself, trust your instincts — and just do something.

We'll see you in the trenches.

How to Be an Effective Volunteer

Firearms Owners Against Crime is a grassroots political action committee (PAC) dedicated to our constitutional freedoms and gun rights in Pennsylvania. We defend and advance the rights of citizens to own and use firearms for all legal activities, including self-defense, hunting, competition, and recreation. We work to elect pro-gun candidates and lobby for pro-gun legislation.

We are a non-partisan, all-volunteer organization. In fact, volunteers like you provide the muscle for our work. We need YOU to help hand out literature, write legislators, put up posters, run special events, and go door-to-door with candidates, work phone banks and more.

Volunteering can be fun and rewarding, but it carries some responsibility as well. When you work as a volunteer, your words and actions reflect on Firearms Owners Against Crime. If you want to act as a totally free agent, that's fine. If you want to act as a volunteer for us, you need to realize that you are part of a successful team.

Here is what we expect from ALL of our volunteers:

Act in the best interests of gun owners. As a volunteer, you are on the front lines of the fight between gun rights and gun control. Everything you say or do should be directed toward helping the cause and aiding Firearms Owners Against Crime. Think before you speak. Keep in mind that what you do affects all of us.

Pitch in. We need a lot of help with a lot of things. If we need help with something specific, we'll ask. However, you don't have to wait for an invitation. If you have a special skill or a good idea, let us know. If you want to put up posters or hand out our wallet cards or brochures, contact us. This is the sort of initiative that benefits ALL of us.

Show up. This is probably more important than anything else. There are more than enough people who talk about gun rights. What we need are people who DO things. About 10 percent of our success is great ideas, but 90 percent is the result of people just SHOWING UP!

Be patient. There's no quick fix and no magic bullet. Changing the laws takes lots of work and lots of time. We're effective because we never give up. If you're looking for a quick resolution to every problem, you're going to find this sort of work frustrating. If you stand firm and keep working with us, it will eventually pay dividends.

Keep up-to-date on the issues. You don't need to be an expert on politics or the law, but it helps when you are reasonably familiar with your legislators and the laws we are either fighting or supporting. The best way to keep up is to subscribe to FOAC E-News and visit [FOAC](#) frequently. Our website is Pennsylvania's most complete source for up-to-the-minute news on progun laws, candidates, and events.

Be courteous at all times. There is no excuse for treating anyone in a rude or disrespectful way. That includes those who hold different ideas on the gun rights issue. How you act is far more important than what you say when dealing with people. Don't get angry. Keep your cool.

Dress neatly and be well groomed. You should be clean and dressed in a presentable way at all times. If you show up at the Statehouse, you should wear business attire. For informal events, neat casual clothing is fine. We are in the public eye, so we want to present a professional appearance. When in doubt, ask.

Don't bash politicians on our side of the issue. No one is perfect. And you will inevitably be disappointed with politicians from time to time. But we can't afford to alienate a candidate or representative who supports us. They are professional and personal friends. We need their help.

Never represent yourself as a spokesman. You are NOT to speak for Firearms Owners Against Crime. We must stay "on message," and you have a responsibility to educate yourself as to what that message is. If you say the wrong thing, it could be used against us or the candidates we support. Simply refer people to one of the FOAC officers or a campaign spokesperson.

Never, ever be under the influence. What you do on your own time is your own business. But you cannot be under the influence of alcohol or illegal drugs at any time while acting as a volunteer.

Have fun! Yes, being a volunteer can be a lot of work sometimes. But it's also rewarding. It's something you can be proud of. If you show up regularly, you will have an opportunity to socialize with like-minded activists and gun owners and make life-long friends. And not everything is difficult. Even if you just do a few small jobs now and then, you can make an important contribution to the cause and have a blast!

Become 500 Times More Powerful Politically

Although written in a somewhat partisan fashion, FOAC PAC believes the tactical political information contained herein is important for ALL gun owners to consider, regardless of party.

The Most Powerful Office in the World is Not the Presidency of the United States!!

"I was a Precinct Committeeman for 16 years and I eagerly encourage others to do likewise." - Phyllis Schlafly, President, Eagle Forum

Conservatives take pride in their knowledge of the Constitution and the outward forms of American Government. Many can quote the Founding Fathers: "The least governed are the best governed" (Jefferson), "Government is like fire, a useful servant but a deadly master" (George Washington), etc. We work hard electing a few tokens (like Reagan). But the bottom line is, we know next to nothing about the real system of American government, which isn't the fairy tale we're taught in school.

That's why years after the "Reagan Revolution" taxes (and tax-funded abortions) are up, the real Federal debt (with Social Security and other Federal pension liabilities) continues to skyrocket, government regulations and mandates multiply like rabbits. Public schools, the Second Amendment, gay rights — I dare you to find one public policy issue that isn't worse from a conservative perspective!

If you are tired of seeing things continue to go down the drain, you must understand how liberals

dominate our government. You must understand the seven laws of American government:

1. If you want to change things, change the laws.

Remember all the nonsense we learned in school about "Coequal Branches of Government"? Actually the Founding Fathers made Congress far and away the most powerful branch because it was "closest to the people."

The President can't spend a dime unless Congress authorizes it. Congress can reject treaties and Presidential appointments, mandate programs the President doesn't want (by overriding vetoes) and even determine if the Supreme Court can rule on a case (Article III, section 2, "...the Supreme Court shall have original Jurisdiction...with such exceptions and under such Regulations as the Congress shall make.")!

Because our state constitutions are modeled after the Federal Constitution, it's the same story at the local level. Governors and State Supreme Court Justices have some influence, but ultimate power lies in the same legislature that passes the laws and determines what happen in our society. Unfortunately, most legislatures are dominated by liberals.

2. To change laws, change the lawmakers.

No citizens or group can possibly keep up with the thousands of laws passed each year by U.S. legislatures. Sure, a big protest campaign can change a vote or two. But after all the shouting is over, sometime down the road, liberal legislators quietly pass whatever they wanted in the first place. There's really no substitute for legislators we can count on whether our eyes are on them or not.

3. Our people have to be on the ballot to get elected.

When was the last time you were really enthusiastic about a candidate? How often do you vote for the "lesser of two evils"? Ever wonder why, despite the rhetoric, both major parties promote anti-conservative policies after they are elected?

4. To get on the ballot, our people must win a major party primary. Except in very rare cases, everyone we elect in the fall wins a major party primary. Because one party usually dominates a district, 90% of legislative seats are actually decided in the dominant party primary, not in the fall. Usually no more than 20% of registered voters bother to vote in these all important primaries. In dominant party primaries with multiple candidates (very common after an incumbent retires), less than 7% of registered voters determine who goes to the legislature (Campaigns and Elections magazine says la major-party nominations for governor or U.S. Senate in the 1990's went to candidates who won with less than 50% of the primary vote). Since only about half of the eligible population bothers to register to vote, I estimate about 4% are telling all the rest of us what to do! Some naive conservatives fall for third party appeals of "conservative" leaders who are more interested in fundraising than results. But our "winner take all" system (like England and Canada) does not provide for proportional representation. Winning 10% of the votes in a general election gets us nothing. Winning 10% of the votes in the primary of the party that dominates a district usually wins a legislative seat.

5. Party endorsed candidates win the primary.

Sometimes candidates endorsed by local party organizations lose primaries, but it's rare. Endorsements mean you get party money plus party workers who will pass out sample ballots with your name prominently endorsed. Primary voters are no different than anyone else. They don't have a lot of time to study the qualifications of primary candidates and their stand on the issues. Usually they see the party endorsements, assume "the Party knows best," and punch the appropriate holes.

There are state, ward and township party organizations, but the basic unit of U.S. government is the county. In nearly every case, the party endorsements the primary voter sees are made by a county executive committee. This executive committee is usually elected by the county's precinct committeemen.

These committeemen are elected in the party primary from every precinct (normally about 500 voters) in the county.

In some states, the office of precinct committeeman goes under another name (in Michigan, they are called precinct delegates; in Ohio, it is precinct executive). Sometimes (as in Illinois' Cook County), the county executive committee is elected by primary voters from an entire ward, township or county.

But such widespread voting for a major party's county executive committee is the exception, not the rule. Normally it is the locally elected precinct committeemen who ultimately control endorsements. Each state has slightly different rules for getting on the primary ballot for committeeman. For example, in Illinois (outside Cook County) you must file the signatures of any 10 registered voters in your precinct 90 days before the primary. In Ohio, you must file 5 signatures 75 days before the primary from voters who either voted in you party's primary or didn't vote in any primary in the last two years.

The rules (and the name of the office) may differ slightly from state to state, but it's usually easy to get on the ballot to run as a committeeman.

6. It's not necessary to have a majority of the county committeemen to influence the endorsement process.

Here's how it works in my home county, Allegheny County PA. Allegheny County is majority Democrat. To advance their agenda, liberals get elected as Democrat committeemen. There are hundreds of precincts in Allegheny. Of the 300 or so elected committeemen, about 10% are conservatives, 15% are liberals and the rest are "regulars" mainly interested in patronage and power who usually could care less about issues like abortion, gay rights, gun control, etc.

Say X and Y are running for Allegheny County's executive committee. Each has half of the "regulars". Where are they going to get the necessary voters to get a majority? From 45 liberals or 30 conservatives? And once elected, who do you think the winning candidate is going to endorse in the next primary — a liberal or a conservative? That's why most of Allegheny County's officials vote liberal. That's how 45 people in a county of almost 1,000,000 control the endorsement process. In my county, it's not 4% telling all the rest us what to do, it's less than one hundredth of 1%!!

Occasionally, some rich amateur will dump millions into a campaign and become a senator or governor overnight. But for the vast majority of politicians, it's a long, slow grind to the top. Each step of the ladder, they need a party endorsement — endorsements which in both parties are dominated by liberals. Is it any wonder why we get the government we do?

In summary, to change things, we must change the laws. To change the laws, we must change the people making them. To get elected, our people must get on the ballot. To get on the ballot, they must win a major party primary. To win the primary, they should get endorsed by their party. To get a party endorsement, we must find, train, and elect precinct committeemen who will in turn elect the people who make party endorsements. Precinct committeeman is the most powerful office in the world

because it is committeemen who ultimately determine who goes to Washington D.C. and our state capitol.

7. The most powerful office in the world is easy to get!

Allegheny is typical among PA counties. At least 25% of the committeeman spots of the dominant party are normally "vacant." In these precincts, if you get on the primary ballot with no primary opponent, the only way you can lose is through an almost impossible write-in campaign.

In the other 75% of precincts, you will probably have to oust an incumbent committeeman (sometimes they withdraw rather than fight). But most incumbent committeemen are patronage hacks who do little besides drop off party literature and endorsements. (When was the last time any committeeman came to your door?). \$50 for literature, a few weekends visiting the hundred or so homes that might vote in your party's primary and any dedicated conservative can win.

In our experience, it's very rare for a conservative who follows the formula above to lose to a "Regular" Republican committeeman — even a "regular" who has had the office for decades. I've even seen one issue zealots who insisted on converting everyone to their cause (pro-life, gun rights, etc.) eke out wins. Those who follow our advice and say "I'd like to represent your views to the Republican Party. What do you think are the most important issues?" usually win 2 to 1.

Of course, being a conservative is harder in the Democrat Party, but there are many "Blue Dog Democrat" areas where conservatives can win and the Democrat party is the only game in town. As several previous Presidential elections have shown, it's a mistake to put all our conservative eggs in one party's rickety basket. Believe me, big business and liberals never make that mistake. They always join the dominant party of their area, no matter which it is. Voting for the Executive Committee and determining those critical primary endorsement is by far the most important power of precinct committeeman, **but there are others:**

Access to Neighbors. The media makes conservatives look like kooks. No wonder conservative politicians have problems. As the dominant party's committeeman, you can reach people who would never come to your church, social club or home. Most voters are eager to know about their government and the people they elect. Even the most apathetic have some interest in an institution that is taking about half their income in taxes, mandates and fees.

Respect from Politicians. Committeemen represent 500 voters and those key party endorsements. Any call or letter from a committeeman is going to get a lot of attention from elected officials of their own party.

Launching point for other offices. Running for committeeman is the best place to start learning how to build winning coalitions. One of the big problems among conservatives is the notion that running for office is like running a business. Levelheaded businessmen, who wouldn't dream of being their own lawyer in court, somehow think they can win against experienced, entrenched liberals without any prior political experience.

Control of party leaders and platforms. Committeemen influence or control most party matters. If the Republicans dump pro-life and other conservative positions from their party platform, it won't be because of election results. It will be due to a handful of liberals who have patiently wormed their way to high party positions, starting as precinct committeeman.

Now you know how our Government actually works, just like the insider liberal/anti-gunner does. You can continue to picket, write letters to the editor and your Congressman or choose to utilize your

time and effort most effectively by stopping politics in its' tracks from the inside.

So stop wasting time, run for precinct committeeman and start using the anti-gun organizations tactics against them.