Don’t settle for average when it comes to your child welfare system.

Michigan’s child welfare system is being updated and improved through legislation sponsored by Michigan Rep. Joe Schomacker. He also sponsored legislation, signed into law in January, that seeks to update and improve the state’s child welfare system. He also sponsored legislation, signed into law in January, that seeks to update and improve the state’s child welfare system.

Many other BILLD alumni hold leadership positions on health and human services-related policy and appropriation committees in their respective legislatures.

COMMITTEE CHAIRS
- Indiana Sen. Ed Charbonneau, class of 2008
- Iowa Rep. Shannon Lundgren, class of 2018
- Minnesota Rep. Rena Moran, class of 2021
- Nebraska Sen. Sara Howard, class of 2013
- North Dakota Rep. Robin Weisz, class of 1999
- Wisconsin Sen. Patrick Testin, class of 2018

COMMITTEE VICE CHAIRS
- Illinois Sen. Sara Feygenholtz, class of 1995
- Indiana Rep. Shane Lindauer, class of 2019
- South Dakota Rep. Marli Wiese, class of 2019

COMMITTEE RANKING MEMBERS
- Indiana Rep. Robin Shackelford, class of 2014
- Kansas Sen. Barbara Bollier, class of 2012
- Ohio Sen. Cecil Thomas, class of 2015

PROVINCIAL MINISTERS
- Manitoba MLA Cameron Fransen, Minister of Health, Seniors & Active Living, class of 2012
- Saskatchewan MLA Jim Reiter, Minister of Health, class of 2008

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BE PREPARED FOR 'CHALLENGE' QUESTIONS, AND BE SURE TO STAY IN CONTROL

We live in a 24/7 drama society, and as a legislator, you’re sure to face “challenge” questions that seem intended to create conflict and drama — for example, someone challenging you, your work as a legislator and/or your leadership in a public setting of some kind.

Our immediate reaction might be to become defensive, evasive or contentious, part of the “freeze, flight or fight response” that is inside each of us. But there is fourth human response — make a friend. If your answer to a “challenge question” is friendly, assured and to the point, you’re likely to emerge unscathed, if not victorious, with most audiences.

You’re able to do this by being prepared and in control. As a result, too, you can avoid being perceived by your audience as negative or hostile or intimidating. (If you come across that way, your audience will be negative, hostile or unfriendly toward you.)

By rising above, you maintain your leadership to effectively communicate with all audiences.

KNOW YOUR LISTENING AUDIENCE IN ORDER TO EFFECTIVELY COMMUNICATE

Who is your target audience for the presentation? Is it the general public, industry groups or perhaps the media? Know who they are and why they come to hear you speak. Were they invited, cajoled or interested in the topic?

What are the demographics of your audience?

The more you learn about who you are speaking to, the better you are able to craft your message to meet their needs. Think about why they have agreed to come and hear you speak, in essence allowing you a chance to entertain, educate or enlighten.

Effective communication only works when you know who you are talking to, your audience.

BE CAREFUL, TOO, ABOUT SPEAKING IN POLITICAL JARGON OR TECHNICAL LANGUAGE. THAT CAN BE A TOUGH ADJUSTMENT, BUT IT’S CRUCIAL. DON’T TALK OVER OR DOWN TO YOUR AUDIENCE.

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Along with leadership, the two other drivers for success in every spoken exchange are control and preparation.

1. Know the purpose of your presentation, and convey it to your audience. Effective communication only works when you know your purpose for presenting. Why have you been asked to speak? What is the intended outcome? These are questions to help you prepare for success. Otherwise, you’ll be talking with no action to be taken by your audience. (Remember the importance of leadership to communication.)

2. Remember that your audience is listening these days, and very few take action. You must be clear and concise.

3. Put in the time to build your own knowledge and expertise. Don’t settle for average when it comes to your level of knowledge and expertise. Anyone can be average today with Google and Wikipedia, but true knowledge comes from the work you do daily in studying, learning and helping others. Always position yourself as the expert. And if you are not an expert, do what it takes to become one. It will make you a better presenter, lecturer or guest.

4. Know how to shape your message so that it will be remembered. The key to successful speaking comes down to clarity and conciseness. Real points can be remembered and repeated. These must seem obvious as well as reminding you to wear clothes for your event, but amazingly enough, most people are unprepared in crafting key message points for the audience to remember long after the presentation is over. If you don’t have your points down in a clear, succinct and memorable manner, your audience will not be able to follow you. Clear messaging is critical to effective communication and leadership.

Dear Reader: I can almost guarantee that no one is listening and that what action was taken, rarely does anyone know.

Deb Sofield coaches executives to “Speak without Fear.” As a national speaker, author and former radio show host, Sofield is known for her high-energy, fastpaced and motivating style. Her best-selling book “Speak without Fear” is available on Amazon. She can be reached at deb@sofeld.com.

1. Know the purpose of your presentation, and convey it to your audience.

Through the the Bowhay Institute for Legislative Leadership Development, or BILLD, CSG Midwest provides annual training on leadership and professional development for newer state and provincial legislators from this region. This page provides updates on alumni of the program, as well as information related to the BILLD program, leadership development and legislative leadership. CSG’s Midwestern Legislative Conference BILLD Steering Committee — a bipartisan group of state and provincial legislators from the Midwest — oversees the program, including the annual selection of BILLD Fellows.