

From Jeremy Hilton's article (full article can be found at the following URL):

<http://spousebuzz.com/blog/2013/08/how-to-be-a-great-military-spouse-advocate.html>

Eight Rules for Great Military Spouse Advocacy

1. If the people who are affected by a decision or policy change aren't at the table, you are doing something wrong. In the disability movement, there is a famous phrase, "Nothing about us without us." When it comes to bureaucracies, many times this concept is purposefully overlooked. Whether it's in a spouse club, wing commander meeting, or in the Pentagon, those most impacted by a policy should have a seat at the table. I'm not suggesting that the decision always has to be in the advocates favor, but that their input is considered. In the end, doing so is in everyone's best interest as the decision or policy change will be better for having taken this step. Sometimes our leadership just needs that reminder.

2. We need to appreciate everyone for what they are doing, not for what we want them to do. Kids or no kids, job or no job, both sides should respect the other's situation in life. We will all move in and out of our capability levels over time.

As an advocate, we need to meet people where they are at, not where we want them to be. There are all different kinds of capabilities and different levels of support. Be prepared when you are told "no" (and consider below rule three). We should be thankful for any help a fellow spouse can provide and not chastise them for not meeting our preconceived notion of what they should be doing.

3. Learn to say no. Not every idea is a good one. I've learned that many times your first intuition about a person or idea is usually a good one. Learn to say "no" to that person or idea. In the advocacy world, you are guaranteed to make mistakes, but always remember that your reputation, particularly as it relates to trust, is the most important currency you can have.

The other piece of saying "no" is that you need to maintain focus. Being an expert in one policy area is better than being an amateur in two or three.

4. When you see a fellow military spouse who wants to learn or expand their repertoire, take them under your wing and help them learn the ropes. We should be training the next generation of military spouse advocates. We certainly didn't get to where we are without lots of support from the generations that came before us. Pay it forward and don't be that "Queen Bee".

5. You don't need to, nor should you, be doing it all. Almost none of us are being paid for this advocacy work. When you stop liking what you are working on, take a break or try something else. Your family and your military family needs you around for the long haul and it is exceptionally easy to get burned out.

6. Professional and concise is the order of the day. Hone your message and then deliver it. Craft your thirty-second **elevator speech**. Creating relationships is important but remember; the message is why you are there. Sometimes our leadership, Congress, or whomever you are speaking with would love to talk about anything but the issue at hand.

7. Senior spouses have lots to offer. So do junior spouses. Both can learn from each other and have much to offer the other end of the spectrum. Both need to listen and learn.

Really listening is such a gift and we have so much to teach each other. Don't get hung up on the officer-enlisted divide, the "old" versus "young" spouse issue, or whether one spouse has a college degree or not. Experience really does count for something, so listen when that senior spouse provides you input. You aren't obligated to follow their counsel, but I would recommend you consider it. Likewise, many junior spouses are much more connected to what's happening on the ground and can provide amazing input on what really matters to today's military families.

8. We are stronger together than we are apart. "No kidding," I'm sure you are saying. However, for whatever reason, it's a lesson we military spouses seem to forget much too often. We don't always have to agree at the tactical level, but when it comes to strategically advocating for our families, we need to keep this rule in the back of our collective heads. In the end, we need to find a way to support each other, even when we disagree.