

Ethical Guidelines for Meeting with the Tobacco Industry

A. The Tobacco Industry's Motives for Discussion

The tobacco industry has realised the importance of combating hostility and courting public favour. The industry claims to have changed; it says it acknowledges the health information on tobacco and also that it does not want youth to smoke. However, most of the programmes currently suggested by the industry to achieve this are known to have little impact on youth uptake and tobacco consumption in general.

The fact that it is the tobacco industry, not you, that is calling for dialogue is highly significant, and their goals may include:

1. image transfer - increasing the legitimacy and public perception of the industry, even shareholder value, by association with the name of tobacco control advocates, organisations or government bodies.
2. neutralisation of critical voices.
3. building personal relationships within your organisation and other tobacco control advocates.
4. gaining information on tobacco control strategies.
5. demoralisation and undermining of public health NGO influence with government bodies.
6. undermining tobacco control advocates by all of the above.

The tobacco industry will try to pull the debate to where they want it, which is:

Doubts over passive smoking
Economic effects of ad bans
Tax increases lead to smuggling
'freedom' issues

'Dialogue' thus carries many inherent dangers, including the urge to reach a consensus. Interaction with industry may also be extremely time-consuming, especially if it continues at increasing levels.

B. Initial Steps to Take When Approached by the Tobacco Industry

If they want to meet with you, the question to ask yourself is how will it benefit you or the well being of consumers in your country. (You do not want to argue with them.) It is okay to debate them publicly in the media.

If this meeting materialises, it will definitely benefit the tobacco industry. They will issue press statements saying they are co-operating with you, they will use the occasion to prevent you from going on the offensive.

One example of a possible meeting with the industry is the following:

If your complaint is that cheap cigarettes means children have easy accessibility to cigarettes - they will say they have evidence to show price does not encourage children to smoke. They will want to know what evidence you have. They will suggest they also do not support children

smoking and will volunteer to address the problem. They themselves will want to educate young people against smoking and impose self-regulation among the retailers selling cigarettes to children - all these programmes have been carried out elsewhere and have proven not to work.

There are opportunities and risks of talks with the tobacco industry, and there is no risk-free strategy for dealing with this industry. The alternative of not meeting also carries dangers, such as the accusation that you are shutting the door, that you are not taking legitimate interests (for example, of tobacco farmers) into account, and in general that you are not listening.

However, with consideration of all possible outcomes of meeting with the industry, it is strongly recommended that you decline the Tobacco Industry's offer to meet with you.

C. When National Governments are Approached by the Tobacco Industry

Further Guidelines are needed when advice is asked by national governments as to how to deal responsibly with the tobacco industry. This is particularly complex as such a diversity of commercial and state monopolies exist, and when the industry offers sponsorship or industry-funded youth or schools programmes. In the interim the 1999 World Bank Report, *Curbing the Epidemic*, with the core message that tobacco control measures will not harm a country's economy, should be even more widely distributed and debated. Also the US pamphlet entitled 'Core Principles Statement between the Public Health Community and the Tobacco Producers Community' should be disseminated as a possible template for other countries in establishing common ground.

D. Guidelines For Meeting Interaction If You Decide To Meet With The Tobacco Industry

Although it is recommended that you decline an offer to meet with the Tobacco Industry, if you so decide to meet with them regardless of the disadvantages, guidelines are outlined below. For the moment, it is recommended that the purpose of any meeting will be only to provide an opportunity for the tobacco industry to present information to you. Meetings should not be interpreted as a dialogue unless, in your appreciation, such dialogue can, under particular circumstances, aim towards achieving your goals. The locus of control of any meetings with the tobacco industry must lie with you.

You must, for any meeting:

1. **Set the meeting agenda**
Ask them first what they want to discuss with you - in writing - then you can decide if you agree with the meeting or not. In other words set the agenda before hand and stick to it closely. The meeting should be kept brief.
2. **Make clear the goal and structure of meeting.**
A covering letter acknowledging the meeting and/ or a statement read out to the industry at the meeting must emphasize that the meeting does not imply partnership, dialogue or collaboration (See Sample A written for meetings between the World Health Organisation and the tobacco industry.) You most certainly do not want for the meeting to end with happy hand shakes all round and with the impression that you and the tobacco industry are going to work together.

3. Decide the meeting location.
Hold the meeting on your premises so that you are in control. They are asking to discuss with you so they have them come to your premises.
4. Pre-determine all meeting participants.
Ask how many tobacco industry representatives are coming, their names and positions. Usually they will send a troop: lawyer, PR, Senior executives, etc.
5. Have your lawyer present at this meeting.
He/she should be advising you closely on this.
7. Moderate the meeting.
8. Write the only official minutes.
9. Maintain the right to terminate the meeting at any point.
10. Distribute information on the meetings as appropriate.
To avoid misrepresentation of meetings, information on all meetings should be circulated within your organisation.

After the meeting you must:

11. Publicly correct any misinformation regarding the meeting.
12. Decide on follow up questions that must be answered after the meeting.

Sample A

In order to ensure that the goal and structure of your meeting with the industry are clear, a covering letter acknowledging the meeting and a statement read out to the industry at the meeting must emphasize that the meeting does not imply partnership, dialogue or collaboration. Below is a sample written for meetings between the World Health Organisation and the tobacco industry:

"This scientific committee comes from a public health perspective and our purpose is to advise WHO on issues of product regulation. We are consulting with any organisation or individual who can have useful information in this area of public health. The purpose of this session is to provide [name of tobacco company] with an opportunity to be heard on the issues specified in the letter dated XXX, namely the effect the changes to the design and manufacture of tobacco products will have on toxicity, addictiveness, satisfaction, initiation to tobacco use, relapse in former smokers and impact on non-smokers, and how these changes and their effects could be measured. Please make particular reference to efforts underway within your own company to reduce the toxicity of tobacco. The Committee would like to emphasize that it does not want you to mischaracterise the nature of the meeting such as to imply that there is a working relationship or collaboration or partnership."

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