

PubAffairs Profile

Name	John Lehal
Job Title	Associate Director
What academic /professional qualifications do you have?	BA (Hons) Economics PGCE Secondary Teacher Training (Maths)
How did you get into Public Affairs?	I joined the Labour Party at 18, sick of the injustice of Thatcher's Government: from the destruction of manufacturing industry to the creation of the internal market in the NHS; from the Poll Tax to three million unemployed. I did my time as a party activist in my constituency, and was involved locally whilst at University. We fought the Tories on the doorstep so I became involved in election campaigning. I got some experience as a local election agent and campaign manager and earned my stripes locally. I put myself forward locally as a parliamentary candidate for the 1997 election, and was selected as Labour Candidate for North East Bedfordshire in October 1995. The campaign was enjoyable and tiring. Having spent so much time fighting for and then seeing the election of a Labour government, I decided against a career in teaching, and became Parliamentary researcher to one of the newly elected Labour MPs. After two years in the job, I joined a small consultancy as an account manager. Five years later, I'm at my third consultancy but still enjoy working with many of my original clients.
What other careers did you consider?	I left university unsure about what I wanted to do, but I knew I didn't want to join a graduate recruitment programme with a large corporate. So I thought I'd delay making a decision so I did a post-grad in teaching. I can see myself as a teacher even today, but the fact was I loved the politics.
How did you get your current job?	After two years as a researcher, I realised I had no long-term career prospects there, and was ready to move. My MP's constituency was home to some big corporates so I came into contact with consultancies or lobbyists. I therefore applied to some agencies and landed a job at a small agency, Profile. Within 18 months it had been acquired by Westminster Strategy, so I ended up at an industry leader. I joined Edelman in January 2003.
What characteristics do you need to work in Public Affairs?	In consultancy you need knowledge, confidence and communication skills. Clients want advice and have to be sure you know what you're talking about and this is done by having a firm foundation of knowledge. You need to be able to understand a situation and advise on the strategy necessary for the client. Finally, as you'll often implement strategy, you need to be hard-working and resilient to deliver for your client. As a consultant you need to communicate with a whole host of audiences, legislators, pressure groups, clients, media, and colleagues, so effective communication skills and the ability to adapt for the audience are paramount. Writing skills too, I spend my life going from strategy paper to briefing note, to new business letter to proposal document! You need to be confident as networking plays an important role, and astute if you're to grow your clients. As a line manager you need skills to ensure you understand your colleagues, can develop their skills, and support their career development.

<p>What skills are most important in your job?</p>	<p>There are numerous skills, but I d say the most important are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • able to analyse situations, develop an effective strategic approach. You then have to be able to develop and implement tactics to meet the strategy and achieve objectives • show a high level of integrity and authority in counselling and consulting and develop relationships • competent in financial management, invoicing, billing, running profitable accounts • a good people manager and mentor, in order to understand colleagues needs, and communicate on their career development • and finally, be a perfectionist: it s important that you don t leave yourself exposed to clients, so every thing has to be flawless.
<p>What does your current role entail on a day to day basis?</p>	<p>I am part of ten strong public affairs team at Edelman. At any one time, I work on between 5 and 8 clients. I am responsible for direction of client programmes and management of the team. This includes development and delivery of strategy, account staffing and management, and hopefully developing and growing the business. I am responsible for all aspects of financial management and responsible for the development of two direct reports through effective delegating and coaching.</p>
<p>Point to some successful campaigns you ve worked on</p>	<p>Norwich Union ran a campaign to lobby for increased resources for flood defences. As an insurer they were finding that properties were flooding every year, causing anguish to householders, costing the industry and thus increasing premiums. Our campaign used a variety of techniques from face-to-face meetings with influencers and decision-makers; working with backbench parliamentarians through establishing the All Party Group on Flooding; forging partnerships with stakeholders such as the Local Government Association, Environment Agency and National Flood Forum; selling-in the story to the political media, resulting in coverage in the House Magazine and a film on On The Record. In the Comprehensive Spending Review the Government announced additional funding for Flood Defences. The campaign is a nice example of using a variety of techniques and partners to deliver a positive result.</p>
<p>How do you go about making contacts?</p>	<p>Networking is a self-perpetuating process: the more you network, the more people you meet, the more events you re invited to! I turn up at as many networking events I m invited to, whether that s a think-tank seminar; a parliamentary reception; or an NGO s Christmas drinks. A lot of my client work is in the health sector, so I have got to know people in this space.</p> <p>I read anything that s put in front of me, the House Magazine, Tribune, PH7, Health Service Journal, PR Week, Public Affairs Newsletter, Municipal Journal, Third Sector do you get my drift?! As a result I know about personnel movements whether that be in consultancy, stakeholder groups or in wider political circles. The second thing reading does is give you the knowledge to have a conversation with anyone you bump into at networking events.</p>
<p>How has networking at PubAffairs helped you?</p>	<p>I find it a good place to catch up with friends who I have previously worked with! There s a great cross-section of public affairs professionals there. Everyone s so approachable, so it s a good place to go if networking is new to you.</p>
<p>What advice would you give to anyone looking to break into Public Affairs?</p>	<p>I think there s only so much you can do with theory, so the practical experience of working in politics or preferably Parliament is crucial, particularly if you re going into a consultancy. This grounding gives you the knowledge and understanding of parliament, procedures, politics and personalities to advise your clients. I really dislike the fact that graduates often have to volunteer for an MP before securing paid employment, but now that they get more generous allowances for MPs, hopefully we ll see less of this.</p>