

make it happen

A step-by-step guide to scoring your dream job.

grassroots lobbyist

BY BETH MORIN

amy lesser

her gig: She's a grassroots lobbyist for the Center for Environmental Citizenship (CEC). It's her job to get teens and 20-somethings involved in environmental issues. (Hers is different from the job of a direct lobbyist, who tries to get politicians to support the issues her organization cares about.)

how she got started: "In my high school yearbook I wrote that my goal was to make a difference. I meant it. Senior year, I was voted 'senator for a day,' and I proposed a bill to keep tax money from being taken from the town's schools. After months of talking to townspeople, it won by 1 percent of the vote! Then, as a grad student at the University of Wisconsin, I saw an ad for an Internet director at the CEC. I graduated—and got the job."

daily grind: "First, I skim through my 150 listservs (daily e-mails that keep me up-to-date on environmental news). As editor of *EarthNet News* [the CEC newsletter], I write Internet news briefs that tell teens about environmental issues. I'll also call congressional aides on Capitol Hill to see if legislation is coming up for a vote, like a bill to restore the Florida Everglades. If so, I'll put that in the newsletter and urge our subscribers to fight for the cause by writing to their congresspeople."

the secret of her success: "Victories are hard-won. You've got to be the kind of person who can bounce back and spur on the troops after defeat."

fast facts

Want to learn the ropes? The Close Up Foundation (www.closeup.org) offers week-long study programs through Close Up Washington, which brings high school students from around the country to Washington, D.C. Teens get to talk to lobbyists and attend seminars with congresspeople. For details, go to their Web site.

SALARY SCOOP

Grassroots lobbyists can earn anywhere from \$20,000 to \$80,000 a year. A law degree or experience as a congressional aide can add a few zeros to your paycheck too.



your career road map

find your cause. Read your local paper and weekly news magazines (like *Newsweek*) to find an issue to get passionate about. "Xerox stories on big issues—like gun control—and start a Fight-for-It folder," says Sara Jane Boyers, author of *Teen Power Politics*. Then, find out how you can support your new cause by logging on to www.dosomething.org. It lists organizations that need help.

take action. Once you find your cause, start a chapter in your school. The **Sierra Student Coalition**, an environmental group, has tips for effective activism and can tell you how to plan a rally and write a powerful letter to a public official. (Call 888-JOIN-SSC.) "This will look great on a résumé," says Amy. "A 3.9 average is impressive. But lobby groups really want to see how politically active you were in high school and college."

join a political campaign. You'll be making sure someone who shares your views gets into office. Find the number of campaign headquarters near you by calling Information.

grab an internship. Log on to www.idealists.org and you'll find new opportunities for high school students updated daily.

take the right courses. "No college offers a major in lobbying," says Bill Shingleton, Lobbyist Researcher at the Center for Responsive Politics. "But there are classes that'll help you land an internship, like political science, public relations, and public speaking. Also, since most of the largest lobbying groups are located in Washington, you might consider attending college in the D.C. area." His suggestions: Georgetown University (www.georgetown.edu) and American University (www.american.edu).