

by Robert J. DeSousa



Back to Basics Revisited

In my first president's message, I reminded you

that the Federal Bar Association is a vibrant and dynamic organization. We are truly federal, with our state chapters, and also national in scope, with a Board of Directors and National Council to bind us. This unique system of governance—in the realm of bar associations—helps us remain flexible. It enables us to make changes as needed, and over the past 12 months, we have worked to firm up the basics.

How did we do this? It's simple. Rather than scurrying off in new and trendy directions, we hit hard on the basics of the FBA.

We have streamlined our staff and increased responsiveness. Karen Silberman, our new executive director, has helped us increase membership to its highest point ever, create an informative e-mail newsletter, streamline our voting procedures, update our website, and make our social media venues productive. Also, despite the hard times faced by all volunteer organizations, the FBA is on an upward—not downward—spiral. Its achievements will be on display for all to see in San Juan!

We emphasized strong chapters with a solid membership policy and procedures in place. Our vibrant sections produced webinars, seminars and top flight materials with consistent policies. We focused on developing a strong support for our federal system of justice and our federal judiciary, which will be manifest to all by the breadth and depth of judicial officers at our convention.

By securing our basics, at all levels—chapters, sections, divisions, vice presidents, national counsel, the FBA Board, and the staff—we made the transition to our new executive director easy, and we not only endured difficult economic times, but we grew during them.

So what do I leave my successor and longtime FBA friend, the Hon. Gus Gelpi? A few words on the basics:

First and foremost, the board and leadership must maintain its focus on the membership. Membership is the lifeblood of the association. We must measure all we do against the question, "Does this help our members, and does it help us grow in membership?"

Second, YOU, our individual members must look around. Have you asked your attorney friends to join, brought them to an FBA event, forwarded them an FBA e-mail, or mentioned an FBA event on Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, etc.? Each of us can do our part simply by asking someone to join. Please do it today! Send an e-mail, make a call!

Third, last year, chapter leaders ensured that each chapter has a written membership plan, a membership coordinator, chapter

activities and CLE programs in which membership is pushed. They all made sure members knew what the membership numbers were and if the chapter was growing. If chapters continue to put on good CLE programs and events and follow through with the requests to rejoin or join, numbers will continue to increase. Chapters are also firming up their basics when they have a robust leadership ladder, chapter board, and Younger Lawyers Division point person. Keep it up, and we will grow!

Fourth, vice presidents connect the chapters to the national function. They have served as a source of training and ideas for the chapter. In addition to doing basic outreach to individual members, vice presidents can also check in on and help chapters in their circuit grow. This year, many vice presidents coordinated with past presidents and the membership committee to push growth. They made regular contact with the chapters and membership chairs in their circuits to ensure the completion of basic duties and support the flow of ideas and information.

Fifth, section and division members and leaders found others who fit into their section or division and asked them to join. Through webinars, meetings, and substantive CLEs, they spread their knowledge to benefit all members. Their reaching out to chapters and offering to do CLEs has been an awesome way to help our organization.

Last, but not least, National Council, a repository of knowledge and skills, has answered the call. It has welcomed new members, volunteered to assist with new chapters, and played a vital role in reviewing policies and procedures of the FBA.

Once again the FBA has proven itself to be the most economically priced, most flexible, and most dynamic bar there is. We are truly federal in that we give great autonomy to chapters, but as individuals, we join not only a chapter, but a national organization that includes sections and divisions. We get three for one! Let's all continue to make sure we build on our basics, and we will continue to grow. I look forward to seeing you in San Juan! ☺

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Robert J. DeSousa". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, stylized initial "R" and "D".