

President's Message

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Chapters, Leadership Training, and Diversity

Unlike any other nationwide bar association, the Federal Bar Association is uniquely structured with geographical chapters in 37 states, Washington, D.C., Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. For many FBA members—perhaps for most of them—

the association's chapters are the frontline delivery system for programs, networking opportunities, communications, and many other professional activities. Many FBA members tend to associate and identify with their local chapters, much as many individual practitioners develop a special relationship with a particular section or division. Local chapters have the advantage of being able to rally around the federal courts in a specific jurisdiction and sponsor outstanding programs, thus adding value for lawyers who practice in that area.

The FBA's national leadership is ever vigilant about helping chapters remain strong and capable of providing quality programming that will be meaningful to the association's members. One of the most tangible benefits that the national organization provides chapters and their officers is the annual Chapter Leadership Training Program held each spring in Washington, D.C. This two-day conference provides the FBA's new local leadership with a jump-start to their tour of duty, and the program is continually ranked as one of best programs sponsored by the FBA. And this year's conference in April was no exception.

It is no coincidence that the majority of the FBA's most successful chapters send their top leadership to these very informative sessions. Current and incoming chapter presidents gain a tremendous amount of exposure to the resources of the national organization, learn the ins and outs of chapter management, and get an opportunity to network with their colleagues from around the country. This year there seemed to be an endless stream of program suggestions describing success stories about what to do and how to do it that chapter leaders swapped during the conference.

When it comes to the succession of chapter leadership, the ideal planning scheme for each chapter's officer track is to include—in fact, to require—participation in the Chapter Leadership Training Program. The benefits gained and the pitfalls avoided by those new leaders more than offset the two days these new officers sacrifice to come to Washington.

One incoming chapter president at the recent leadership conference told me that he had been involved with his chapter for years and found the program focusing on chapter leadership to be very valuable and timely as he prepares for his term of office. Another chapter leader noted that she was able to take several concrete program ideas back to her chapter and that these ideas will enhance the chapter's local programming. Several other leaders provided examples of successful new chapter programs that were direct results of information obtained by their predecessors who had attended the Chapter Leadership Training Program during their tenure.

The FBA's national leadership and the professionals at our headquarters encourage all chapters to include leadership training through the Chapter Leadership Training Program in their plans for preparing future leaders of the association's chapters. Every chapter will be very happy with the results.

Now a few words about diversity. The term itself connotes changing times and a changing workplace. But diversity is much more than a contemporary buzzword or an aspirational goal. Diversity is part of the reality of doing business today, and the work of voluntary associations such as the FBA is included as well. The FBA has a solid and exemplary record of being at the forefront of diversity both internally within the organization itself and externally with respect to programs and expectations of others in the bar world.

At the association's national level, several women and lawyers of color have held top leadership positions, including the office of national president. Given an outstanding and diverse talent pool and the positioning of several individuals to assume leadership roles over the next few years, that trend will



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continue well into the future. The current national Board of Directors includes a wide array of truly diverse talent along the lines of gender, race, age, practice field, and geography—the product of nationwide elections by the FBA membership.

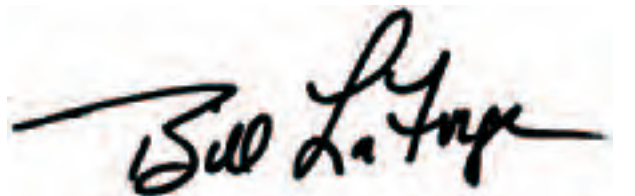
The FBA has benefited from a natural and genuine tendency toward diversity for many years because of the diverse nature and composition of the association's membership around the country. However, the national leadership is ever mindful of the need to be vigilant about diversity issues and to ensure that the organization is truly inclusive and representative in every way at all levels of endeavor.

The association's emphasis on diversity includes recognition of the need for chapters to focus on local diversity in recruitment, programming, and leadership succession. Some of the FBA's chapters sponsor excellent local programs on diversity. Many have diversity chairs or committees to ensure high performance and meaningful results in matters of diversity. These activities are certainly worth emulation by all chapters.

In the recent chapter leadership training program in Washington, a delegate from the Minnesota Chapter presented an excellent program on diversity that stimulated thought and drew wide acclaim from the participants. Meaningful suggestions from that program that can be helpful and instructive to all FBA chapters include the following:

- creating a diversity mission statement and setting goals;
- reaching out to minority bars;
- collaborating with existing diversity initiatives in the community;
- establishing partnerships with mentoring programs for minority youth;
- ensuring that diversity affects all aspects of the chapter's activities; and
- involving new lawyers, law students, and judges in diversity programs.

Just as law firms and government agencies have learned the importance of a strong focus on diversity issues, so should the FBA—on a national as well as a local level—continue to promote diversity in all its activities and to provide leadership on this important topic. It's not just the smart and prudent thing to do; it is the right thing to do. TFL



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