

President's Message

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Back to Basics

THE FEDERAL BAR Association is a vibrant and dynamic organization. Our focus is on being truly federal—that is, on having chapters in all the states, which are largely autonomous, but also are national in scope with a board of directors and national council to

bind us. This unique system of governance helps us remain flexible, allowing us to greet change with open arms. That is not to say change is without its challenges; we face some major challenges as we go forward. First, our executive director, the unflappable Jack Lockridge, has retired. Jack has been an outstanding leader for our organization and will be sorely missed. Karen Silberman, our new executive director, is ready, willing, and able to help our board lead us forward, but there will be some turbulence ahead. Second, these are hard times for all volunteer organizations. This and our changing society create the white water through which we must sail.

What then is our remedy for these issues? Let us fall back on the basics of the FBA—that is, strong chapters, vibrant sections and divisions, and a strong support for our federal system of justice and our federal practitioners. Our whole team—vice presidents, National Council, the Board of Directors, all our other leaders, and the staff—will make the transition to our new executive director easy, and we will not only survive difficult economic times, but we will also grow during them. How, then, do we do this?

The answer is that we must focus on membership, the lifeblood of the association. We must grow our membership in order to grow our message. We must measure all we do against two questions: Does this help our members, and does it help us grow in membership? What then are the basic steps toward that end?

First, individual members can look around—have you asked your attorney friends to join, brought them to an FBA event, forwarded an FBA email, or mentioned an FBA event on Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and other social media? Each of us can do our part simply by asking someone to join. Do it today! Shoot an email, make a call! Each individual member can also provide feedback. Let us know what is working and not working in the FBA. Do both of these things: (1) Ask someone to join, and (2) Provide feedback to the Board of Directors and to me personally.

Second, chapter leaders can ensure that the chapter is covering all the basic areas. A written membership plan, a membership coordinator, and chapter activi-

ties and CLEs in which membership is pushed are essential, as is making sure all members in the chapter know what the membership numbers are and if the chapter is growing. If chapters produce dynamic events and follow through with requests to join or rejoin, numbers will increase. Chapters are also covering the basics when they have a robust leadership ladder, chapter board, and YLD representative.

Third, vice presidents are the bridge between the national leadership and the chapters. They serve as a source of training and ideas for the chapter. Each vice president can not only do the basic things each individual member can do, but can also check in on and help chapters grow in their circuits. Regular calls and emails with chapter presidents and membership chairs in their circuits ensure that the basic chapter duties are being done and support the fire flow of ideas and information.

Fourth, section and division members and leaders can find others who fit into their section or division and ask them to join. When our sections and divisions put on substantive CLEs or write articles for their newsletters or *The Federal Lawyer*, they spread their knowledge to the benefit of all members. Sections and divisions leaning forward, reaching out to chapters and offering to do CLEs in chapters are an awesome way to help our organization.

Last, but not least, National Council is a repository of knowledge and skills. It is made up of all current national leaders—for example, the Board of Directors and vice presidents for the circuits, section and division chairs, chapter presidents and delegates, past national presidents, and appointed members. National Council members can make sure their chapters are informed of what is going on at the national level, present resolutions for consideration, bring timely topics to the attention of the board and volunteer their skills to help key groups like our membership committee, the Younger Lawyers Division, and some of our struggling chapters.



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consistent with Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 26(g), if addressed and applied early in litigation, can save clients significant costs and business disruption.

Seasoned lawyers—if open to change—can learn a lot from the new generation. Younger lawyers are unlikely to take a client relationship for granted and the experienced lawyer's practice can be rejuvenated by collaborating with a lawyer eager for experience and success.

It May Be Tougher to Find Opportunities—But They Are There.

Lawyers may have to look harder and in different places for the best opportunities. Sheryl Sandberg, of Facebook, offered this advice in her 2012 commencement speech at Harvard Business School: “Look for opportunities, look for growth, look for impact, look for mission. Move sideways, move down, move on, move off. Build your skills, not your resume. Evaluate what you can do, not the title they're going to give you. Do real work.”

Until the number of graduating law students is consistent with demand, the job market will be rough. For the newer lawyer, internships, temporary assignments, contracts, and non-partnership track positions can help build skills and experience. Alternative positions may also provide flexible options. Hard work and success in any position will likely lead to something else. In the long run, career paths with more twists and turns might lead to more satisfying and rewarding work.

We Can Still Be Proud of the Legal Profession.

The practice of law in the federal courts is genuinely rewarding. It is a privilege to serve clients in Federal Court. If you are reading this magazine, you are already part of the federal family and appreciate the collegiality of federal practice and the Federal Bar Association. Federal Court judges, such as those profiled in *The Federal Lawyer*, have dedicated their careers to our justice system. FBA membership rosters include the best and the brightest in federal practice. Despite the difficult economic times, lawyers continue to devote time to pro bono clients and other volunteer work. The FBA's annual awards, including the Sarah T. Hughes Civil Rights Award, Ilene and Michael Shaw Public Service Award, and Elaine R. “Boots” Fisher Award, reflect the bench and bar's focus on service beyond the billable hour. Individual FBA chapters, including Minnesota, Pennsylvania, and Washington, collaborate on and support pro bono and pro se litigant programs.⁵

Conclusion

These are just some of the reasons for optimism. Talented, creative lawyers who can put themselves in the client's shoes will find ways to open new doors and be in demand. And, if you don't believe it, then consider one final reason to be optimistic: research has shown that optimism may increase your life span, reduce the risk of depression, and increase your resistance to the common cold.⁶ **TFL**

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Endnotes

¹Lincoln Caplan, Editorial, *An Existential Crisis for Law Schools*, N.Y. TIMES (July 14, 2012), at SR10.

²Median Private Practice Starting Salaries for the Class of 2011 Plunge as Private Practice Jobs Continue to Erode, NALP (July 12, 2012), www.nalp.org/classof2011_salpressrel.

³See Ryan Lytle, *10 Law Schools That Lead to the Most Debt*, U.S. NEWS AND WORLD REPORT (Mar. 22, 2012), www.usnews.com/education/best-graduate-schools/the-short-list-grad-school/articles/2012/03/22/10-law-schools-that-lead-to-the-most-debt.

⁴See Robert Denney, *Midyear Update: What's Hot and What's Not in the Legal Profession*, Legal Communique, Robert Denney Associates, Inc. (June 27, 2012), www.robertdenney.com/pdf/comm-legal-hot_not_2012.pdf.

⁵See *Chapter Initiatives*, Federal Bar Association Minnesota Chapter, www.fedbar.org/Chapters/Minnesota-Chapter/Chapter-Initiatives.aspx (last visited July 23, 2012) (Minnesota); *Middle District of Pennsylvania Pro Bono Attorney Program*, U.S. District Court for the Middle District of Pennsylvania, www.pamd.uscourts.gov/docs/probone.htm (last visited July 23, 2012) (Pennsylvania); *About our Organization: Our History*, Federal Bar Association Western District of Washington, www.fba-wdwwash.org/history.php (last visited July 23, 2012) (Washington).

⁶See *Positive Thinking: Reduce Stress by Eliminating Negative Self-Talk*, Mayo Clinic (May 28, 2011), www.mayoclinic.com/health/positive-thinking/SR00009.

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The FBA is 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 also a national organization that includes sections and

divisions. We get three for the price of one! Let us all insure we are watching our basics and we will grow. After all, “If it is to be, it is up to me.” **TFL**

