

Reading *The Federal Lawyer* Is Half the Battle

by John Okray



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Our lives seem like they only get busier and busier. Television, radio, Internet, apps, social media, and text messages are all distractions, and time sinks. At work there are more and more committee meetings, conference calls, and emails to read and respond to. This leaves us very little time to devote to our personal lives, much less our professional development. In the legal world, the availability of substantive information is overwhelming—content from national, state, specialty, and local bar associations, in-person conferences and CLE programs, webinars, legal magazines, law journals, law related websites, online legal publications, emailed articles, tablet and cellphone apps, etc. Given all of these options and surely a hectic schedule, I sincerely thank you for reading *The Federal Lawyer*, and this At Sidebar article no less.

“To acquire the habit of reading is to construct for yourself a refuge from almost all the miseries of life.”

—W. Somerset Maugham

A handful of people have told me that they literally block off time in their schedules to read their preferred publications. While it may seem like a luxury, it makes a lot of sense. They do not have to find the time, monthly issues do not go completely unread, and it ensures that they stay current and broaden their legal knowledge. Consider scheduling a couple of hours each month over lunch, bringing your periodicals on the train or plane, etc. Establish a routine to ensure you take time to unplug and enjoy your favorite reading materials. It is good time management.

Finding time to read *The Federal Lawyer* in today's world is impressive. But I would like to challenge you to take the next step in managing your time profitably, by writing.

Writing

Why should you? All the cool attorneys are doing it. It will make you feel good. Sorry for the peer pressure, but these are actually true statements, and in this case

there are only positive side effects. But you may ask, “How can I find time to write?” Well, how do you find time to do the other things you enjoy and that are important? Additionally, there are likely some activities you engage in now that simply do not have the same return on investment as writing will. Sorry, Netflix!

There are numerous reasons to consider writing, such as researching a substantive area that interests you; your research could even make you a subject-matter expert. You certainly will increase your visibility and that of your law firm. Writing also offers the possibly to spotlight an individual or group that deserves recognition. And, of importance, it allows sharing your wisdom with your peers and promoting ideas and practices that could improve our profession.

As you have surely written during your legal career, whether memos, briefs, or opinions, authoring articles should not be intimidating. Start out slowly and build up to longer and more complex topics. A finished product that you can be proud of is generally assured, because you will receive feedback on your draft article as part of the editorial review process. Over time your writing skills and confidence will only improve, and the process will become easier and, believe it or not, enjoyable.

“We are all apprentices in a craft where no one ever becomes a master.”

—Ernest Hemingway

While you should not bank on legal writing to move you into a higher tax bracket overnight, it is still very rewarding. You may gain new clients; learn about a new area of the law, allowing you to expand your practice; be recognized through the hiring or promotion process; or perhaps establish credibility for a future teaching role. For me, the biggest payoff comes when I learn that an article or book has helped someone in any way.

In some ways writing reminds me of painting, as they are both forms of art. Your abilities might be basic at first, but over time your work becomes

FBA Substantive Law Entities	Publication
Alternative Dispute Resolution Section	<i>The Resolver</i>
Corporate & Association Counsel Division	<i>Corporate Articles</i>
Federal Litigation Section	<i>SideBAR</i>
Immigration Law Section	<i>The Green Card</i>
Labor & Employment Law Section	<i>The Labouring Oar</i>
Transportation & Transportation Security Section	<i>TransLaw</i>

FBA Chapters	Publication
Minnesota	<i>Bar Talk</i>
New Orleans	<i>The Advocate</i>
Puerto Rico	<i>From the Bar</i>
Southern District of New York	<i>New York Minutes</i>
Utah	<i>Federal Jurisdiction</i>

increasingly creative, complex, and interesting to its audience and recognized in the community. At some point recreational painters become known as artists. Similarly, you may be considered an author or writer. Seasoned painters may go on to teach aspiring artists, and experienced authors may become editors assisting up-and-coming writers.

Forum Shopping

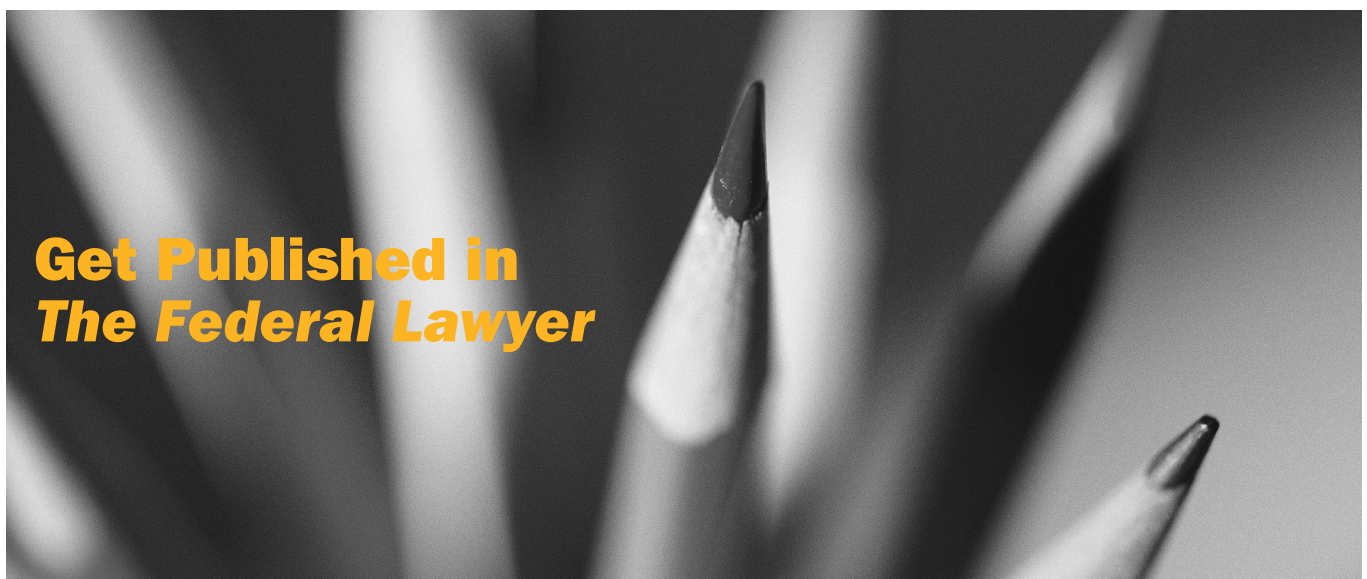
Do not worry about looking for the proper venue; *The Federal Lawyer* is very author-friendly! As you have seen by now, the

magazine publishes a broad range of articles—in-depth, substantive themes; shorter columns and practice tips; judicial profiles and interviews with other highly regarded figures in the legal community; news and events; and activities from FBA chapters, sections, and divisions. There are too many federal legal areas covered to name them all, but examples include admiralty, antitrust, banking, bankruptcy, criminal, environmental, health, immigration, Indian, labor and employment, securities, taxation, and transportation. The point is that finding a suitable topic for *The Federal Lawyer* is relatively easy. Additionally, to make it easier and more pleasant to read, the magazine does not conform to law review formalities. Therefore, writing an article does not involve an unreasonable time commitment or spending countless hours with your Bluebook.

While not all submissions are accepted or slated for publication immediately, *The Federal Lawyer* staff and editorial board make every effort to publish well-written, subject-matter-appropriate articles when possible. If you have an idea, you can always contact *The Federal Lawyer's* managing editor, Sarah Perlman tfl@fedbar.org, to see if your proposed article might be appropriate or whether a themed issue covering your practice area has been scheduled.

In addition to *The Federal Lawyer*, there are a number of other publication opportunities. The FBA has numerous chapters, sections, and divisions with their own well-respected, substantive newsletters. In the box, you will find just a few of the many options that you might consider if you were looking to target a specific practice area or region of the county. (These and many others may be viewed on the FBA's websites.)

Hopefully you will make it a point to regularly read a printed publication like *The Federal Lawyer* and perhaps even submit an article to this or another FBA publication during 2016. Take the time and reap the rewards. ☺



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