

CHAPTER 19: MANAGING YOUR ORGANIZATION'S RELATIONSHIP WITH THE SENIOR BAR

It is important that young lawyer leaders maintain good relations with the senior bar. This will help avoid problems and eliminate obstacles. In fact, sustained cordial relations may result in money, technical assistance and personnel from the senior bar.

Senior bar leaders realize that young lawyer organizations are training grounds for the future leadership of the senior bar. In addition, senior bar leaders know that young lawyers often have the most energy and enthusiasm and originate many of the freshest ideas and best projects. Many of the senior bar leaders are former leaders of local, state and national young lawyer groups, and may be sympathetic to their problems and needs.

Nevertheless, not all senior bar leaders are so understanding or informed. There may be present or past problems between your young lawyers group and the senior bar that need to be identified and dealt with. The problems may be the result of a lack of communication or understanding that can be remedied, probably at your initiative, through meetings with senior bar leaders, informing them of activities and programs, including them in events, and discussing problems that arise. The ideas below should help you resolve existing problems of communication and avoid new problems.

1. Meetings with Officers

The best place to start is by meeting in person with your senior bar counterpart. Both the Chair and Chair-elect of the young lawyers group should attend the meeting in order to build a good foundation for future years as well as the present. Find out as early as possible what your senior bar counterpart's objectives are for his or her term in office. If you can dovetail your organization's projects with his or hers, or offer to marshal the troops for a volunteer-intensive project, you will enhance the relationship. You should also consider asking the senior bar leader if he or she has the time to attend or to address a meeting of your Board.

2. Raising Your Affiliate's Profile

You may be surprised to learn that senior bar leaders often do not know what your organization does. Despite all of your good work and enthusiastic volunteers, you may not have raised your profile sufficiently with the senior bar. Consider asking for an opportunity to report on one of your activities at a senior bar board meeting. Include the senior bar leaders on the mailing list for your affiliate's newsletter. Send clippings of newspaper articles concerning your affiliate's activities to senior bar leaders. If you receive a grant or special recognition for one of your projects, be sure your senior bar leaders know about it.

In some states and localities, the Chair of the young lawyers section sits on the Board and/or Executive Committee of the senior bar. If the senior bar lacks formal young lawyers representation on its Board, you may want to propose such representation, suggesting that it provides better information on what each group is doing and how they can work together on issues. Acceptance of such a suggestion will be greater if your young lawyers section has helped the senior bar on projects and demonstrated a willingness to pitch in.

3. Attend senior bar meetings

This is important for several reasons. First it provides you with an opportunity to promote your activities, thereby justifying any funds that you receive from the senior bar. Second, it allows you as a young bar leader to network with senior members of the bar and begin to build relationships that will aid your affiliate and your career as a lawyer and bar leader. Third, it will enable you to hear the concerns and interests of the senior bar leadership. Many bar associations have seen reductions in the number of members over the last few years. This has strained budgets. If you receive funding from the senior bar, you need to be aware of these budget pressures and lobby that your affiliate is not the recipient of budget cuts. You should strongly maintain that the last place the senior bar should cut back is in its investment in its future.

4. Get involved in senior bar governance

Being a young lawyer does not disqualify you from being involved in the governance of your senior bar. You and your co-leaders in your affiliate should seek positions in the House of Delegates and board of governors, or similar governing bodies, within your affiliate. Also, ask the senior bar leadership to appoint lawyers to task forces and committees that study important issues. If you are going to pay dues to be a member of the senior bar, you should have a voice in its governance. That's the old taxation without representation argument. Young lawyers generally make up a sizable percentage of a bar association. In Connecticut, for example, the Young Lawyers Section of the Connecticut Bar Association is the largest section of the Bar Association; Larger than even the

litigation section. Therefore, make sure young lawyers in your affiliate have a seat at the table.

5. Develop activities that meet the concerns of the senior bar: By attending senior bar meetings, being involved in senior bar governance, and meeting one-on-one with senior bar leaders, you will learn about the senior bar's concerns. If they are concerned about civility in the profession, organize events that help to improve civility. If they are concerned about diversity in the profession or on the bench, organize events that address diversity and that will create more diversity. If they are concerned about multi-jurisdictional practice, seek appointments of young lawyers to a task force studying the issue, and possibly schedule debates about the issue.
5. Show the senior bar that young lawyers have some clout too: All bar associations have an agenda. Many volunteer bar associations are involved in lobbying. Seek out members in your affiliate who can assist the senior bar's agenda. If you look at your state legislature or city council, you probably will find young people, and especially young lawyers, in elected positions. Many of these people are our close friends, colleagues or relatives. Use these contacts to assist the senior bar in fulfilling its agenda. Moreover, seek out opportunities to testify before legislative committees about legal issues in your affiliate. This provides you with good exposure and demonstrates to the senior bar that you are committed to furthering their agenda. Clout also can come in the form of a young lawyer's ability to get a senior partner at his or her law firm to speak at a seminar or become involved in studying an issue.
6. Seek publication opportunities: You need a bully pulpit, so to speak. You need to be out and about to get out your message and report your activities to all lawyers in your affiliate. Seek a column in a legal newspaper, magazine, or other publication that is read by lawyers, young and not so young, in your affiliate. If your affiliate has a monthly publication, they should devote a column or page to the young lawyer leadership in that affiliate. This is an excellent way to promote your activities and recruit new leaders.
7. Invite senior bar leaders to meetings: Your affiliate should dedicate at least one meeting a year to report your activities to the senior bar leaders. At this meeting the affiliate leader should be careful not to make this into a chair's report, but rather give an opportunity to the other leaders in your affiliate to tout their accomplishments. Part of being a leader is allowing other people to obtain necessary exposure for their accomplishments. This type of meeting will reassure the senior bar that their affiliate's future is in good hands.

8. Follow Through In All You Do

Another way to establish good relations with the senior bar is to be effective in whatever you do. Undertake only what you can accomplish and follow through on your promises. Be realistic in your projections of time and money. Because of youth, exuberance and enthusiasm, young lawyers often underestimate the amount of work involved in projects. A single well-thought-out and executed project is quite an accomplishment and makes a much better impression than one that, although ambitious, cannot be completed.

Even though you have undertaken all of the suggested ways to improve communications with the senior bar, you may still encounter problems in the relationship. Try to keep the channels of communication open while you design an alternate plan using a more creative approach. Confer with your “kitchen cabinet” and past young lawyer leaders in designing your plan. You may also want to consult with other organizations, including the ABA/YLD, in formulating a plan to resolve any outstanding conflicts with the senior bar.

If your affiliate has a good relationship with the senior bar, these suggestions will help you nurture it. If your affiliate has no relationship with the senior bar, these suggestions will help you develop it. In either event your affiliate will be in a better position to thrive if it has strong ties with the senior bar. Part of being a leader is bringing people together for a common cause. As a young lawyer leader, your affiliate’s cause can not be adequately fulfilled without bringing together young lawyers and senior lawyers.