

## CHAPTER 3: YOUR ROLE AS CHAIR OF A YOUNG LAWYER ORGANIZATION

### A. Introduction

Your year as chair of a young lawyer organization should be exciting, time-consuming and stressful; however, a few basic rules will reduce your workload and allow you to focus on leading the organization, rather than chasing down every detail yourself.

### B. Leadership Strategy

It is helpful to limit your year to one or two overall themes. For instance, your emphasis may be on greater service to the public. You should pick that as your main theme and develop the majority of your programs around that theme. In addition, your first newsletter column should outline your objectives and the programs that follow the objective. After you have picked a particular theme, stick to it. Nothing will undermine your year more than constantly changing objectives.

Leadership, however, involves more than just choosing themes. It involves presenting a role model of an individual who has a commitment to the profession and the community, someone who can somehow find the time to work full-time and still be a leader in the bar. Leadership involves channeling the efforts of people with strong, often contrasting opinions towards a common goal. It is more than keeping peace among factions – it's challenging them to put aside differences to work together. Leadership also involves cheerleading; motivating people and making them feel important and good about what they are doing for the organization and the community.

### C. How to Get it Done

The delegation of responsibilities to officers, section council members, committee chairs and bar staff is critical to the success of the section's programs. As detailed in a previous chapter, you will want to sponsor an orientation program during the summer for committee chairs and Board members to set forth the objectives for your year and to delegate responsibility for getting each program done. In addition, the orientation program should provide reasonable deadlines for getting a program completed.

### D. Getting Yourself Organized

The YLS calendar you prepared as part of creating your working plan will be extremely helpful in getting you organized as Chair. It should contain all programs, officer and/or executive committee meetings, council meetings, senior bar board of directors or governors' meetings and committee meetings. This tool is useful in organizing your time. In addition you should add to your own calendar such other reminders as the dates for sending in your newsletter column, letters to new members and thank you notes to participants in programs.

The bar staff may be in the best position to maintain a master calendar for the section. They can add or change dates of events as they occur. When scheduling events, committee chairs

and organizers of programs and activities can check with the bar staff to make sure there are no conflicts.

In organizing their time devoted to bar work, some chairs devote a substantial portion of one day a week to their activities as chair. They try not to schedule anything else on that day and generally work at bar headquarters in order to avoid “distractions” at the office. Four to five hours of uninterrupted time can be much more valuable than 15+ hours of correspondence. During this time you should consider calling the officers and committee chairs for agenda items and writing the newsletter column. The agenda for the next executive committee and council meeting can be drafted and sent out to the appropriate persons. Finally, a block of time set aside offers time to review and approve the expenses submitted and determine how your organization is doing with its budget.

Other chairs do not set aside one day, but sandwich bar activities into a portion of each day. Some draft their correspondence and major written work over the weekend while devoting several hours a day to telephone calls and matters that cannot wait until the weekend. Others try to set aside one specific segment of each day to devote to bar work. As according to what best balances your responsibilities as chair with your needs as a practitioner. In any arrangement, there will also be times when you will need to drop everything in order to take care of an urgent bar matter. However you organize your time, you need to stay on top of things at all times and need to prioritize your time constantly.

#### E. Make Lists; Set Deadlines

Making and revising lists of things to do will help you sort out the many tasks you need to take care of and help you avoid forgetting important events and activities. You will also need to prioritize. Some tasks need to be undertaken immediately, some need to be done by the end of the week, others by the end of the month. Set deadlines for yourself and for people to whom you assign project. Pressure your members to get their work completed by the deadline.

#### F. Making Your Meetings Count

Prepare the agenda for each executive committee or section council meeting well in advance. In addition, you may want to set an arbitrary limit of two hours for section council meetings. Make your agenda specific and stick to it.

If there is a controversial issue on the agenda, call people before the meeting to try and get some sort of consensus. In addition, it is probably a good idea to be available an hour prior to the meeting to talk about any issues that arise at the last minute and problems that do not need to come before the entire council for resolution.

Don't routinely call for reports from committees that have nothing to report. But, if a committee has undertaken a major project, asking the committee chair to report frequently on its progress will impose regular monthly deadlines for the chair and encourage committee activity. There's no worse feeling than reporting that your committee has not done what it was supposed to during the month.

Finally, circulate the agenda ahead of time so that people know what will be covered and on what they are supposed to report. Prior notice and preparation makes reports go faster and may also assure the attendance of a key speaker.

It is important to keep council or board meetings under control. While full discussion is desirable, keep it focused on the issue before the group. Some people love to talk about anything, no matter how verbose or repetitious they are or how irrelevant the subject, and you need to cut them off gently while not appearing dictatorial. If the point of a person is somewhat unfocused, you may want to summarize for him/her what you think they're saying before moving to the next person. After a reasonable period of discussion, be ready to call for a vote or decision on the matter.

#### G. Being a Cheerleader

Your position as chair requires that you attend every single event sponsored by the section. In addition, you may want to call members of the board or council personally and ask them to attend each event. It is a good idea to send a personal invitation to the "senior bar" leadership for each event.

In addition to attending the event, it is imperative that you "mingle" and introduce yourself at each young lawyer's event. This means that you shouldn't stick with you officers, but spread out throughout the room and meet each person who is "new" to the young lawyers. You can recruit a lot of committee people by "meeting and greeting," while at the same time making a lot of new friends. You may want to give your business cards to people interested in getting involved, and invite them to call you. Or get their business card and give them a call soon after the event. Getting a call from the chair makes a great impression on a potentially active new member.

Finally, above all, you must be accessible. When people need to meet with you about something, try to squeeze it in. Take phone calls whenever you possibly can, particularly if the person says it's urgent. Try and return routine phone calls within 24 hours. If you can get back to the person, have your secretary call and tell them you'll be in touch as soon as possible. People who volunteer for projects like to have their phone calls returned, just as clients do. One of the most resounding denunciations of a chair is that "she/he never returned my phone calls."

#### H. Don't Sweat the Small Stuff

It may sound elementary but remember, at all times, that the bar association is a volunteer organization. Don't holler at people and, whatever you do, don't alienate the people who are working for the Section. They are the people who save you from insanity.

In short, don't sweat the small stuff. If a mailing is wrong or goes out late, just get it corrected or make necessary calls to ensure the success of the program.

## I. Conclusion

If your year as chair should have one overall goal, it should be to communicate to all your constituents what you Section is doing. To that end, make calls, write letters and “meet and greet.” As long as people know what you are doing, and why you’re doing it, your year will be on the road to success.