THE PROSPECT OF WRITING A PRESIDENT’S PAGE STRIKES FEAR IN MANY A BAR LEADER’S HEART. Well, fear not. The following strategies, packaged in oh-so-handy president’s-page format, are designed to put you at ease and help you succeed.

1. Make it an opportunity, not an obligation

If your bar culture allows it, liberate yourself to write only when you have something to say. When you do, your president’s page is your bully pulpit. When you don’t? Use your time and talent more productively. Important: make that decision well in advance so your bar publications staff can comfortably adjust.

We’re awash in messages. Drowning, even. If you’re a good scribal communicator – and many bar leaders are – make your president’s page a centerpiece of your communications strategy. If longer-form writing isn’t your strong suit, use your page sparingly and communicate in other ways. We’ve had great presidents at our bar who wrote just three or four pages. Trust me, no one remembers them. The Division for Bar Services has an a big archive of other presidents’ work – make that decision to help you help them. (Don’t promise them you’ll use what they send, of course.) If you’re lucky, they might even send you an outline or draft to get you started.

Careful, though. In my experience, the best pages resonate with rank-and-file members, not just leaders. Be sure to reach out to colleagues, opposing counsel, and other lawyers of your acquaintance. What’s keeping them up at night? Writing mostly for and about fellow bar leaders is a great way to guarantee a small readership. Try to picture someone you know – someone who isn’t a bar leader and doesn’t aspire to be – and speak to him or her as you write.

2. Plan, plan, plan

That way you won’t be anxious, anxious, anxious. You’ll be confronted with some surprises during your presidency, but your page is not one. You know when it’s coming. Don’t make it an unforced emergency.

Calendar your deadlines. Don’t know what they are? Find out. Note the lag time between deadline and publication – if your April page is due in late February, think spring flowers when you write, not dirty snow.

3. Need ideas? Start your topic-generating engine

A little help from your friends. You can use your column to promote bar projects or initiatives. Ask the stakeholders – section and committee chairs, for example – to help you help them. (Don’t promise them you’ll use what they send, of course.) If you’re lucky, they might even send you an outline or draft to get you started.

Brainstorm topics early. You could even come up with potential topics on the flight home from BLI. I say “potential” because you’ll also want to respond to events and speak in the moment. But consider assigning a topic early for every page you intend to write. You can swap in a new idea later, but at least you’ll have something in your quiver.

4. Communicate your passion

Write about something that matters to you and your enthusiasm will be infectious. When John Locallo was president of the Illinois State Bar Association a few years ago, he wrote about his social-media journey of discovery – learning to tweet, setting up a LinkedIn account, mastering Hootsuite. His columns were fun to read and full of helpful pointers, and they furthered one of his presidential goals – to help small-firm lawyers understand the transformative power of technology.

5. Be conversational

You’re writing a column, not a law-review article. Don’t be stuffy. That doesn’t mean you have to be folksy if that isn’t your style. But make sure we can hear a human voice. Try reading your page aloud to see if it sounds natural. If it’s hard to read – if the sentences are too long or dense, for example – revise it until it rolls off your tongue.

6. Write a one-pager

Try to keep your president’s page to an actual page in your journal (find out your word limit from bar staff). That way readers won’t have to jump pages to read the whole thing. Because most of them won’t jump, and some of them will quit reading as soon as they see a jump coming.

7. Bond with bar staff

Meet deadlines. Remember that you’re probably holding up production on an entire publication, not just your page.

Be open to at least light editing. And maybe heavy editing. Every publication has a style that governs, e.g., when and whether to capitalize. At a minimum, don’t insist that your column appear one way when the rest of the publication appears otherwise. Beyond that, your bar publications pro offers a fresh set of eyes if nothing else. If I were you, I would welcome his or her suggestions.