

# BIG SHOES TO FILL: STEPPING INTO THE POSITION OF MANAGING EDITOR

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I remember accepting my law review's managing editor position as if it were yesterday. I could not wait to implement my new ideas and "shape-up" the law review. I was young, I was hungry, I was . . . well, I was completely overwhelmed. The outgoing managing editor was, in my mind and everyone else's mind, the standard by which all managing editors should be measured. I, on the other hand, was not technically proficient; I did not know the *Bluebook* by heart. I often heard, though it did not need to be said, "You've got big shoes to fill."

As an incoming managing editor, you will be faced with many challenges related to publishing your school's law review. Whether dealing with difficult people, succumbing to the demands of the faculty, or trying to get enough sleep to perform all of your duties, the position you have accepted will test you in ways you cannot yet imagine. Hopefully, some of the suggestions and reflections I present in this Essay will assist you in preparing to meet these new challenges.

## I. MAKING AN EFFECTIVE TRANSITION

One of the best ways to hit the ground running is to train with the outgoing managing editor. However, finding time to accomplish this task can be difficult, because many law reviews find themselves very busy just trying to meet their final deadlines. Further, and perhaps going more directly to the heart of the matter, the outgoing managing editor is graduating and generally is preoccupied with "more important things" than training the new guy. Stay on the outgoing editor. Most managing editors realize the legacy they are passing on to you and want to see the law review thrive and become more successful.<sup>1</sup>

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1. For those of you who are curious, this is my one obligatory footnote for this Essay. I spent far too many hours footnoting sloppy shelf-checks (i.e., edit and proofs, source and cite, or whatever your law review calls this process) to allow the staff to have a "freebie" on this

So, what should you strive to learn from the training? As the incoming managing editor, you should learn and understand the publication process and compilation procedures for the law review. Ask the current managing editor about everything he or she knows. You should discuss the publication process in detail and then brainstorm new ideas to improve the process. However, do not reinvent the wheel. The outgoing managing editor can give you good feedback on your ideas to improve the process. By just discussing your ideas with the outgoing managing editor, you will be amazed at how much you will begin to understand the dynamics of your new position.

One of the better training methods I found is simply the “learning-by-doing method.” Ask your outgoing managing editor to give you some of the work that he or she normally would perform. This method will not only be good training for you, but it also will help the outgoing editor with his or her workload. And who does not want less work to do? The thought behind this method is that you get to practice your new job under the watchful and nurturing eye of the outgoing managing editor. If you make a mistake, the outgoing editor will likely catch it.

You need to be sure to obtain all of the administrative materials from the outgoing managing editor. The outgoing managing editor’s schedules and calendars can be useful tools to have when you are setting out your agenda for the yearly publication process. In addition, the outgoing managing editor’s memoranda and letters can help you with your composition of memoranda and letters to the authors. There is no need to draft completely original material to inform the staff of the six most commonly used *Bluebook* rules. So be like Hollywood, do not create, just rehash!

Goodwill, goodwill, goodwill. Before leaving for your summer clerkship, one of the most politically strategic acts you can do is to plan something nice for your articles editors. When I became the managing editor, I had a barbeque and informal first meeting. We all gathered and discussed ways to make the next year run smoothly. An event like the one I describe will help you get the articles editors’ ideas on how to improve the publication process and also will make them feel included in the decision-making process. The event also will give you an opportunity to rally their support, because you will need it!

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short thought piece. Thus, to the staff, I give my condolences, and to the managing editor, this too shall pass.

Once you take over in the fall, do not be afraid to incorporate all of your new ideas. Change can be a good thing for the law review. Of course, you will need to keep the overall goals of the law review in mind and be realistic. With any changes you propose, you should always strive to make the publication process more efficient and, if possible, more enjoyable.

## *II. KEEPING THE PUBLICATION PROCESS ON SCHEDULE*

Once you get back to school in the fall semester, draft a schedule or some type of publication calendar. Remember, the publication process should showcase every member's abilities. Make everyone feel involved and important. One lesson I learned the hard way was the importance of keeping everyone informed of progress. If you keep the flow of communication consistent, people tend to understand what needs to be done.

One idea proposed at our barbeque was to make a large chart to hang up in the law review work area. We envisioned the chart representing all staff according to their current assignment and showing how that assignment fit into the entire publication schedule. This type of chart can be a useful tool. At any given time, the staff and the executive members of the review can visualize the progress of the publication and what still needs to be completed.

One of the harder parts of the managing editor's position is assigning work to your peers. Remember to keep your expectations realistic. You want to make sure there is always something in progress. You will find yourself very frustrated at times when interview season, vacations, and other issues outside of your control create downtime in your work flow. The best way to combat this inevitable problem is to keep the staff busy. Strive for efficiency and make every effort to meet those ambitious deadlines.

One idea that can make your job a great deal easier is to put incentives in place that will ensure high-quality shelf-checks from the staff. Be sure that you are giving feedback constantly on the quality of the staff's work and updating them on things they need to improve. Keep the lines of communication open with the use of memos, e-mail, or staff visits. Be approachable. Those managing editors who do not make themselves completely available to staff members will find that they are not respected, and the overall quality of the work product will suffer.

Another good mechanism to keep the process on schedule is to adopt a grading standard. Our law review had a numerical grading

system. Law students, naturally competitive at their core, will work hard to keep their grades up. Take advantage of this fact and use their natural tendency to provide an incentive.

When dealing with senior members, proceed with caution. These members are your peers. Nothing can “poison the well” more quickly than to have some of your classmates challenging your authority in front of the staff. Therefore, when assigning work to your senior members, give them adequate time to perform their assignments. A good rule of thumb is to be flexible on deadlines, but rigid on quality.

In addition to being troublemakers, your senior members can be a wonderful resource. After all, they have already been through the process and understand how the review works. Thus, encourage the senior members to give feedback to the staff concerning shelf-checks, *Bluebook* rules, job searches, and maintaining sanity. Allow senior members to be the mentors they want to be.

### III. DEALING WITH PROFESSIONALS OUTSIDE OF THE REVIEW

The law review is likely your school’s most visible activity. Most of what goes on in the typical law school is never seen or understood by the outside world. However, the law review is distributed to libraries everywhere. Therefore, when you are corresponding with authors, publishers, and others outside of the review, be professional. Always mandate a response time from the people with whom you deal. For example, when you are sending an article to an author to proofread, give the author a deadline to respond (e.g., two weeks), and let him or her know that his or her failure to respond within the designated time period is equivalent to a presumption of approval.

Ensure that the copy is correct before sending it to the publisher. Remember, it does not cost anything to fix your mistakes before you send the book off for publication. However, once the publisher has “shot” the book, changes cost money. Therefore, the managing editor and the editor in chief should adopt quality control procedures to help keep down the costs associated with publication.

### IV. DEALING WITH RELUCTANT WORKERS

The issue that every law review must face at some point is how to deal with difficult workers. When I was the managing editor, we had a serious falling out when the editor in chief tried to reprimand the staff with a staff-wide memorandum. That episode affectionately

became known as the “memo incident.” Consequently, I would discourage reprimanding the entire staff at once.

What I would recommend is establishing a disciplinary policy if you do not have one for your law review already. When enforcing the policy, be fair but firm. Be sure to provide adequate notice of the consequences for poor work quality, because there is always a staff member eager to inform you of everything he or she knows about due process violations. In the end, the best way to keep people in line is to lead by example.

#### V. CONCLUSION

As my third year of law school came to an end, I often was asked whether serving as the managing editor was worth the effort. At that time, I was completely consumed with the bar exam, and law review was the last thing I wanted to think about. But now, with a little perspective, I realize that being the managing editor was worth the effort. Of course, I learned skills that I often use in the practice of law, and I learned to be a better writer. However, the most important thing I learned was how to lead people through a complex process in order to create a quality product. Now that I am a professional, these “people skills” pay off for me on a daily basis.

Becoming the managing editor on your school's law review is an honor as much as a personal achievement. Use your time wisely to gain experience for yourself and to enhance the reputation of your school. In the end, you will leave your school and your law review in a better place. Good luck!