

LESSONS LEARNED FROM MY FIRST 100 DAYS AS EDITOR IN CHIEF

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*The ability to be cool, confident, and decisive
in crisis is not an inherited characteristic, but is the
direct result of how well the individual has prepared
himself for the battle.¹*

If there is one piece of advice that any incoming editor in chief should accept, it is this — be prepared. From the moment you step into your new role, there will be many expectations you need to fulfill. The executive board expects you to be a competent leader who is dedicated to the law review; the school and community expect you to publish in a timely fashion; the membership expects you to consider their competing commitments and responsibilities. You must be prepared to deal with these expectations and to figure out the best way to fulfill them.

I suggest you plan from the moment you are elected. Create a list of the problems you see and the changes you would like to

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I would like to dedicate this Essay to my parents. They instilled a tremendous work ethic in me and inspired me to pursue my goals and dreams. I hope I am able to make them proud and live up to the example they set. I would like to thank my grandparents and my brothers for their support. I also would like to thank Winston Stephen Christie for his support and understanding. He is the greatest friend anyone could ever have, and he means the world to me.

I want to show my appreciation to the executive board and members of the 2000-2001 *Stetson Law Review* who have put in a great deal of effort. In particular, I would like to thank Sacha Dyson, our executive editor. Her commitment to the *Law Review* and her drive to succeed are matched by few. I also would like to thank Alison D. Clark, Amy L. Drushal, and Lisa Finaldi Simmons for their willingness to put in extraordinary amounts of time and effort during my first 100 days.

There are many others who have helped me and encouraged me, and I would like to thank them as well. Most important among this group is Associate Dean Darby Dickerson. As faculty advisor, she guided me through this time with the greatest understanding and patience. No one has done more for me in this position than she has, and I hope she understands how much her guidance and encouragement mean to me. In addition, I would like to thank Professor Kristen D.A. Carpenter for her encouragement and her ability to make me think about things beyond the *Law Review*.

1. *Quotationary* 641 (Leonard Roy Frank ed., Random H. 1999) (quoting Richard M. Nixon).

implement. At your first board meeting, be prepared to discuss your goals and objectives for the coming year. Make it clear to both the executive board and the membership that you plan to accomplish these goals and that you are prepared to take any necessary action to do so. Yet, keep in mind that this can be a trap for the wary. Be prepared to deal with those people who do not like change — some have been on law review for a few semesters and are accustomed to the way things are run. Be sure to make it clear that your management style and outlook may be different from your predecessor, but that you are open to input from others.

Be prepared to deal with those members and editors who will question and criticize everything you do. You may have the best intentions, and you may have thought very carefully about a decision, but you always must be aware that often you will be the scapegoat and will have to answer for every decision you make. Although this will keep you alert and ensure that you are producing the best work and making the best decisions you can, this also can be difficult. Often, criticism from your peers may not be constructive. You may be faced with someone whose method of communication is abrasive, and you need to be prepared to stay calm and turn the criticism into something that is productive. Do not focus on the negative presentation of the criticism; look for what you can gain from the criticism. If you need to make a change, do so. If not, move on.

Be prepared for a lack of effort by some. As in any situation, you will have at least one person who refuses to put forth effort. You likely will hear many times that members are not compensated, so they do not think things should be so strict and they feel you should not take everything so seriously. You have to understand that not everyone will be as dedicated to the cause as you are. Although you should maintain a positive attitude and be optimistic, always keep in mind that some members will not meet your expectations. These people are difficult to deal with, and you often cannot change their attitude or their work ethic.

Be prepared to deal with poor performance. Do not expect it, and do not be suspicious of every member who has an assignment, but be very careful when you check the work of others. Do not be naive. Some members are not detail-oriented or careful, so you need to be aware of those weaknesses and build mechanisms to deal with them.

Be prepared to deal with disciplining and critiquing your peers. Disciplining your peers is one of the toughest aspects of the job. No

one likes to be criticized, and people are quite averse to discipline, but those who put forth a lack of effort and perform poorly need it. Some may take your actions personally, but it is up to you to enforce the rules fairly and consistently. If you do not, you will not be an effective leader. Sometimes this means that you will have to be the lone voice amongst the other editors. You may have to take a stand with some members, and you may be the only editor willing to do it, but you must realize that “[a] leader does not deserve the name unless [s]he is willing occasionally to stand alone.”² In matters of discipline, you likely will stand alone, but you must remember that discipline is sometimes necessary. Be sensible and fair, and you will be an effective leader.

Be prepared to deal with different stories about and perspectives of the same event. You need to make sure that you protect yourself from this phenomenon. Always try to have another editor or a faculty advisor present when you conduct a difficult meeting. Yet, even if you are unwilling or unable to do this, you must have a paper trail. Making sure that you have the appropriate documentation is critical.³ The more documentation you have to support your decisions, the easier your job will be on a daily basis. In addition, the more feedback your members and editors have, the better their performance will be and the easier it will be for you to critique the work of your peers.

Be prepared to produce your own procedures and rules. Do not be afraid to make an unpopular decision. You often will find yourself in that position, and you need to be ready to make a decision and stand by it.

Be prepared to handle any problems that arise. You must be flexible and adapt to those problems. You also need to be willing to come up with creative solutions to fix them. For example, our *Law Review* recently adopted the *ALWD Citation Manual*.⁴ Many of the rules in the manual are discretionary, which leaves cite and sources and editors without any concrete guidance. As a result, the

2. *Id.* at 441 (quoting Henry Kissinger).

3. On our *Law Review*, we have cite and source feedback forms, galley evaluation sheets, and page proof evaluation sheets. These forms not only provide constructive criticism, they make it easier for you to assess the work of your peers and diminish their weaknesses. In addition, we conduct mid-semester evaluations of all members and editors.

4. ALWD & Darby Dickerson, *ALWD Citation Manual: A Professional System of Citation* (Aspen L. & Bus. 2000).

executive editor and I created a style guide;⁵ we produced a *Law Review* rule for every discretionary rule and also incorporated many longstanding unwritten rules of our *Review*. Through our style guide, we have informed our members of our rules and provided them more guidance.

Be prepared to acknowledge those who are dedicated and substantially contribute to the goals of your law review. Too often, you will not have enough time to recognize those who are working hard. I felt that there was a lack of recognition on our *Law Review*, so I established monthly awards.⁶ It is important that you take the time to recognize the exceptional performance of members and editors. Use meetings and e-mails to encourage members to do their best, and be sure to give them incentives to perform well. This not only benefits the member who is acknowledged, but the entire law review, because everyone will strive to do their very best. In the end, this makes your job easier, because the members will do good work and there will be higher morale. This will improve the quality of your law review overall.

Be prepared to deal with low morale. *Law Review* work can be difficult, time-consuming, and tedious. The difficulty of such work often leads to low morale, particularly amongst the less senior members who feel that they are unimportant and their work is unappreciated. One way we improved our morale was by forming a flag football team. Many members took part. Playing flag football allowed members to relieve stress and also led to a great team spirit. Another way to maintain high morale is to recognize significant events in the lives of the members. We announce the accomplishments of our members, and I make sure that everyone receives a birthday card from the *Review*. Finally, recognizing that members have other commitments also is important. To combat low morale and to provide members with the opportunity to plan their schedules, we post a volunteer list in the office. Members can sign up to receive an assignment early in the semester if they are concerned that other commitments will interfere with their *Law Review* work later in the semester; this opportunity makes it

5. Catherine Elizabeth Shannon, Sacha Dyson & Darby Dickerson, *Stetson Law Review Style Guide* (unpublished guide, Stetson U. College of L. 2000) (copy on file with *Stetson Law Review*).

6. Members are awarded prizes for exceptional work, whether it is a free pass on an assignment or a gift certificate.

possible for members to attempt to avoid the pressure of trying to satisfy various commitments at once.

Be prepared to meet with members; be approachable and available. We have an all hands meeting once a week as well as a weekly board meeting. Try to use such meetings effectively. The all hands meetings provide time for training. During each meeting, we study a different *ALWD* rule; we go through a detailed analysis of the citation for that source. After, members work in groups on an exercise that concentrates on the source. Not only does this foster teamwork, which you should encourage, members also compete for prizes, such as an excused absence from a future meeting or hours added to their time sheet. This is an opportunity to improve the quality of your law review, to improve morale, and to foster friendships. Another key meeting you should hold is a kickoff meeting at the beginning of the year. You should use this meeting to inform members of new policies and the changes that have been made, but also to give them a chance to get to know each other (this is particularly effective when you have new members). At our meeting, we had a campus-wide photo scavenger hunt, played a few games, and enjoyed a buffet-style lunch together. The members had a great time getting to know each other, and I had an opportunity to soften the blow of what some perceived as unpleasant news (our new policies and procedures).

Be prepared to pull a piece or deal with a difficult author. One of my first decisions as editor in chief was to pull a student piece. This can be a difficult decision to make, and you will have to be prepared to support your decision.

Be prepared to make a mistake because you will. Even though we would all like to believe that if we work hard and put in a great deal of effort, the end result will be perfection, you need to adjust to the reality that you will make a mistake or overlook something when you are editing. As long as you are doing your best, laugh it off; no one is perfect and no one expects you to be.

Be prepared to lose a piece of your life. The editorial and management responsibilities of this position require an exceptional amount of time and effort. In addition, everyone will come to you for answers to even the most menial questions, and you need to be prepared to deal with this reality. Everyone will want a moment of your time, and that can be quite exhausting. Sometimes you have to be able to say no, because it is important that you maintain your sanity.

Be prepared to help members with problems that go beyond law review matters. Many members will ask for your help with personal projects. Help them if you have time, because there will be a time when you need help. For example, there are many times when work needs to be done quickly and efficiently. Members are not likely to forget the effort you put forth on their behalf, and they might be inclined to take an assignment on short notice.

You are probably overwhelmed, because much of this sounds frightening, but there also are many wonderful things that you have to look forward to and should be prepared to enjoy. Be prepared to make friends and share lasting bonds. Be prepared for someone to tell you that they admire you and your dedication. Be prepared for the thanks you get for the things you do. Be prepared for a sense of accomplishment. Be prepared to laugh at yourself. Be prepared to enjoy the position. Be prepared to create many wonderful memories.