

THE MOON, THE STARS, AND ALL THE PLANETS: ADVICE TO NEW EDITORS IN CHIEF

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President Harry S. Truman, upon learning of his predecessor's death and subsequently being sworn in as the Nation's president, stated to a crowd of reporters, "Boys, if you ever pray, pray for me now. . . . [W]hen they told me yesterday what had happened, I felt like the moon, the stars, and all the planets had fallen on me."¹ Truman's eloquent quote describes my own feelings about being selected as the *University of Missouri-Kansas City Law Review's* editor in chief. Although the awesome responsibilities held by the Nation's chief executive officer dwarf those of a law review editor in chief, this fact did not help to alleviate my own anxiety. As a staff member, I merely Bluebooked articles and made feeble attempts at crafting them. My background possessed no indicia of editorial experience. Yet, I was expected to oversee an established law journal with more than fifty members. To say I felt a bit overwhelmed would be an understatement.

Fortunately, the anxiety I felt at the beginning of my tenure subsided over time. Through a bit of pluck and luck, mostly the latter, I was able to acquire some helpful leadership techniques. I have listed below a few of the most important tips. Although this list is by no means exhaustive, an incoming editor in chief nevertheless should find a few of the suggestions helpful when supervising his or her own journal.

First, editors in chief should avoid "reinventing the wheel." This past year has taught me that far too frequently editorial board members want to change an existing rule or manual in favor of a completely new agenda. Editors fail to realize that past editorial boards have already confronted most issues and problems that arise. The *University of Missouri-Kansas City Law Review*, like most journals around the country, has been publishing issues since the early part of the twentieth century. Thus, for more than eighty

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1. David McCullough, *Truman* 353 (Simon & Schuster 1992).

years editors have confronted a myriad of problems. While some decisions have been unsuccessful, others have flourished. Naturally, it can be quite beneficial to learn from history's successes and failures.

One relevant example during my tenure revolved around the board's decision to revise the staff manual and editorial policy. Some board members felt that the entire policy needed to be overhauled, while others, including me, felt that the system required only minor changes. One factor that was absent from debate was the rationale behind the current policy. After researching the issue, the editorial board discovered that the editorial policy was carefully thought out to respond to problems that we had no idea had arisen in the past. We decided to maintain the current policy and implement only minor changes. Often, the general rules of logic and efficiency dictate to maintain the status quo.

Second, editors in chief should attempt to include their fellow board members, notably their executive editors, in key decisions. The truth of the phrase "two heads are better than one" cannot be underestimated. Numerous times during my tenure, the editorial board, or what I refer to as the "Brainstrust," provided outstanding suggestions regarding major decisions. Moreover, involving the entire board in the decision-making process increases their interest in the law review's content and quality while avoiding the pitfalls of apathy that can spread like a cancer throughout the law review's entire body. However, an editor in chief must be aware that, regardless of who makes the final decision, the editor in chief bears full responsibility for all decisions. An unpleasant aspect of leadership is that success is shared collectively while failure falls singularly upon the leader. Regardless, I have found the benefits of shared decision-making far outweigh the costs of a unilateral process.

Finally, the most important piece of advice is to be an effective editor through attendance and presence. Woody Allen's statement that "[e]ighty percent of success is showing up" is very relevant to the law review setting.² An editor in chief's presence in the law review office and at conferences, receptions, and meetings conveys to the editorial board the editor in chief's overarching commitment to the journal.

2. Thomas J. Peters & Robert H. Waterman, Jr., *In Search of Excellence: Lessons from America's Best-Run Companies* 119 (Harper & Row Publishers, Inc. 1982).

An editorial position requires a tremendous amount of dedication and effort to respond to an endless number of problems. Unfortunately, this brief Essay, or even a lengthier article, would be insufficient to provide a detailed outline for supervising a law review. However, adhering to a few of the suggestions provided above may help in preventing the constellations from falling and resting upon your shoulders.