

Words of Wisdom

from Past SBM Section Chairs

October 2019

“What are the top three suggestions or pieces of advice you would give to a new section chair?”

- Focus on only 1 or 2, maybe 3, key objectives for the year; don't try to take on too much.
- Know your bylaws! Review and refresh your memory from time to time.
- Use your strategic plan, update it if necessary; work from an overall vision.
- Devote adequate time to the Section, try to block out at least an hour or two each week, make it a habit.
- Set a year-long calendar at the beginning of the term. Create an annual or biennial plan of work and make sure to review it frequently so that priorities are being met, delegating work appropriately.
- Toward the end of the year, be sure your Council works with its successors to set up the Section for ongoing success.

- Delegate, delegate, delegate...
- Assign tasks to council members rather than ask for volunteers. Newer members may be reluctant to volunteer, but you will need help from all of the Council to get everything done.
- Work diligently to avoid factions or divisions on your Council; move your own positions to the middle ground to obtain consensus.
- Always look for new contributors.
- Get buy-in from your members early about the goals for the year.
- Be courteous to everyone, accepting of input and comments.
- Hold accountable council members who do not participate, volunteer, or attend meetings.

- Make detailed meeting agendas and have detailed meeting minutes. Keep communication flowing with your council and your section members.
- Move forward even when faced with negativity from your group; when people complain, ask them to chair the committee to explore or fix the problem.
- Remain light-hearted, but professional.
- Learn how to politely cut-off a discussion that has gone on too long and for no benefit.

- It goes quickly. Give yourself more time than you think for planning events, etc.
- Reach out to past chairs for advice.
- Diligently monitor the SBM public policy website to insure that your council is aware of legislation and court rules that can dramatically affect your attorneys and their clients.
- Work with the State Bar staff. They can do so much for you! E-blasts, registration forms, managing event registration, press releases, articles, ordering trinkets, newsletters, finances, it's endless – work with them.