

Blissful tips for bar leaders from the 2015 BLI

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By Giselle Carson

Giselle Carson is president-elect of the [Jacksonville \(Fla.\) Bar Association](#) and shareholder at [Marks Gray, P.A.](#)

(Editor's note: In this article, a president-elect who attended this year's [ABA Bar Leadership Institute](#) shares some of the ideas she found most interesting and useful. We welcome volunteer contributions such as this one. If you wish to write for Bar Leader, please [email Marilyn Cavicchia, editor.](#))

"It is not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent; it is the one that is most adaptable to change."—Charles Darwin

The 2015 ABA Bar Leadership Institute provided us with blissful ideas, tools and inspiration to make our profession and associations not only survive but flourish in these turbulent times.

Below are some of my takeaways from the 2015 BLI.

End meaningless and meandering meetings

In this engaging workshop, Michael Brandwein, educator and consultant, shared ideas to re-engineer and revitalize meetings, such as:

- Use timed agendas that address the essential items of the meeting first.
- Have a cap of 60 minutes per meeting, and make sure participants are knowledgeable and respectful of the time limits and prepared and motivated to contribute. (Setting time limits creates a practical psychological pressure to keep us focused.)
- If the meeting can't be completed within 60 minutes, stop the meeting when the time limit arrives, take a break to allow for the mind and body to reboot, and call a separate meeting to begin within five minutes, with an updated time limit.
- Motivate participation and engagement by rotating the responsibility to lead the meeting.

(Note: If you're interested in hearing more from Brandwein, be sure to register for the next [Bar School webinar](#), on May 11, during which he will address this same topic.)

Rethink member value offerings

The dynamic duo of Julie Armstrong, executive director, [Indianapolis Bar Association](#), and Elizabeth Neeley, executive director, [Nebraska State Bar Association](#), shared tips to revitalize membership numbers and engagement. The Indy Bar Association is conducting focus groups to learn what is causing members pain, fear, and gains. With this knowledge, the bar is creating programs to address members' needs.

For example, twice a year, the bar conducts a managing partners' roundtable with a keynote speaker who addresses issues affecting managing partners in firms of five or more full-time attorneys. These focus groups provide the bar with needed information and members with customized communications and valued services.

President's columns and social media

Karen Korr, communications director, [San Diego County \(Calif.\) Bar Association](#), and Mark Mathewson, director of publications, [Illinois State Bar Association](#), shared tips for impactful presidential columns and social media communications, including:

- Keep the president's message short ... no more than one page.
- Go outside the circle. That is, engage and encourage ideas and messages from lawyers who are not in the inner circle. Ask them why they are members, and what matters to them. This will help you write an interesting president's column and also help you be a better president.
- Follow your bliss. Write about your passions that can also benefit members. Mathewson shared the story of a past president who was passionate about social media and used this passion to connect and help members. (On a personal note, the Jacksonville Bar might become the healthiest bar association in the nation.)
- Tell a story with a picture using social media. The San Diego Bar has mastered the art of social media to communicate and keep members engaged. Korr suggested planning well in advance, using a variety of media, and including pictures as often as possible to increase the effectiveness of your message.

Rock your public speaking engagements

Meredith Avakian-Hardaway, director of communications, [Philadelphia Bar Association](#), shared the following tips, among others, for speaking engagements:

- Be prepared and practice your delivery.
- Know your audience. For example, be mindful of using acronyms that not everyone may understand.

- Avoid reading your speech word for word.
- Make eye contact and engage with the audience.
- Be visual and tell a story that will be memorable to the audience.
- Start with a powerful opening, such as a startling fact, interesting story, or joke.
- Listen and observe your audience, and adapt based on clues regarding how they're responding.
- Be mindful of the time allowed.

There is bliss in our profession!

Deborah Epstein Henry, founder and president of [Flex-Time Lawyers LLC](#) and co-founder and managing director of [Bliss Lawyers](#), shared information from her important new book published by the ABA, [Finding Bliss: Innovative Legal Models for Happy Clients & Happy Lawyers](#).

The book explores how firms can more effectively deliver legal services for the benefit of lawyers and their clients by focusing on seven key areas: Innovation; Value; Predictability and Trust; Flexibility; Talent Development; Diversity and Inclusion; and Relationship Building.

In the chapter on relationship building, Henry shares ideas as to how bar associations can thrive by providing members with crucial connections, education, and leadership opportunities that might not be readily available elsewhere.

I finished reading and highlighting this thought-provoking and engaging book in a few days. Susan Sowards, our extraordinary Jax Bar executive director, and I will be working with our board and members to implement some of these suggestions. I encourage you, as Henry does, to “be bold and creative to help ensure your professional and personal success, and in turn, your happiness and health!” To bliss!