

PREFACE

During the three years we have spent working on this writing project, we have only had a working title—the “Cookbook.” That nickname perfectly portrayed what we were intending to accomplish— create a guide showing from soup to nuts how to complete some of the most common types of cases immigration lawyers handle. We envisioned a book that would describe all the “ingredients” necessary for putting together a successful case and would also provide step-by-step directions on how to prepare and present the meal. The Cookbook has been designed to help the new lawyer who needs a thorough guide to preparing a case, as well as the more experienced practitioner in search of effective systems to help standardize their practice and help train their team.

I wanted to create a book that would have helped me during some of the more challenging parts of my career. When I began practicing law some 31 years ago, I worked as a junior associate for a large Nashville law firm. The firm had been asked to handle an immigration case and it was assigned to me. The firm lacked an immigration practice, so I had no idea where to turn and I was forced to wing it. There were almost no immigration lawyers in the city, and I had limited resources available to help me figure out what to do. I wanted a book that would have been helpful to that young lawyer.

A few years later, Lynn Susser and I teamed up to start Siskind Susser, and as we built up our practice, we discovered the need for systems. As we added lawyers and paralegals to our team, we were often too busy to document “official” systems at the firm for working on various types of cases. This lack of systems meant that we often found ourselves “reinventing the wheel,” with multiple versions of our intake forms, checklists, templates, etc., as well as slower case completion times than might have been the case had we been more systems oriented. Ultimately, the lack of firm-wide systems impacted our bottom line.

Over the years, however, we “got religion” and began to pay a lot more attention to getting our systems documented and consistent across the firm. That said, having a complete set of systems in place is still somewhat aspirational and we continue to do the work. Both lawyers and paralegals, alike, at our firm have been eagerly awaiting the completion of this book to help get us over the finish line.

I knew at the outset that I would need to team up with an outstanding lawyer to produce the kind of book that would be what AILA envisioned and of which I would be proud to be an author. Fortunately, my law partner Ari Sauer was game for the project. Ari is a gifted attorney and writer and is one of those immigration lawyer’s immigration lawyer types who loves to take on the most complex cases covering a lot of areas of immigration law. He’s also a stickler for detail—something that is obviously important on a project like this.

And so, we went to work. Writing most of this book in the Trump years meant a lot of distractions that challenged our ability to stay on track. Not to mention a little pandemic. But here we are. These days, many of us are thinking about new beginnings. A new Administration. The end of lockdowns. A new way to work. It’s the perfect time to start implementing the Cookbook’s “recipes.”

The Cookbook turned out to be a lot larger than we originally anticipated. There’s a lot involved in putting together the typical immigration case and we wanted this book to be as helpful as possible. We recognize that there are a number of subjects that did not make it into this first edition. Happily, when we embarked upon this project with AILA, we had already planned for annual editions, and each year we will update the existing chapters in the book while adding new subject matter. We hope our readers will like what they see in this first edition and will then look forward to each new edition in the same way they look forward to receiving each new edition of my hero and mentor Ira Kurzban’s book.

We also know that some of our processes will need to be molded a bit to the particular practice set-ups of our readers. Some solo lawyers don’t have paralegals or support staff. Some lawyers in large firms may have paralegals, administrative assistants, multiple lawyers assigned to a case, etc. But we believe readers will be able to adapt the materials for most types of practice settings.

Finally, it has been my goal, since embarking upon this project, to view the material contained herein as something broader than just a book. We view the systems documented in this book as being the backbone of the technology systems law firms use to run their practices. That is particularly true with case management systems, but a lot of the screening tools we have included in the book will become the basis for expert system apps that I've been developing for the last few years. Look for announcements on this, as well, as time goes on.

Greg Siskind
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