

# Out With The Old

## Andrés Martin

*CSE has long been instrumental in providing critical tools to new editors daunted by the tasks ahead, and in socializing them into a very special fraternity of like-minded peers. Less attention has been paid at the other end of the developmental trajectory. In this Perspective I share some of what I learned during the exit phase of my tenure as editor-in-chief.*

As a child psychiatrist, I will occasionally quip with my young patients about their life choices: "Out of all the parents out there in the world, you made an excellent choice by selecting the ones you did: well done!" The approach is certainly not fit for every child, but can at times be disarmingly engaging and set off an interview on a positive and shared track. None of us, of course, have any say in the parents we get. And yet, those of us who are parents know that our children have, in many ways, made us who we are; we would be quite different caregivers, and people in general, were it not for their influence. Our children may not select us, but they certainly mold us.

I found myself coming back to these generational musings as I neared the end of my decade-long tenure as Editor-in-Chief of the *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*. Just as I did not choose my parents, I had no say in who my editorial successor would be. Still, I felt like congratulating myself on an inspired decision I had absolutely no say in. I suspect there may be ways in which some of my actions have helped other candidates and stakeholders get there—I would like to believe that there are things that we can do as editors to optimize our succession prospects. Even if there are not, and even if we fail at securing our wished-for successors, there are certainly ways to ensure a smooth and seamless passing of the baton. To that end, I share some of my suggestions for outgoing editors.

### Start Early: Prioritize Strategy over Chance

Upon becoming Editor-Elect in 2006, I immediately began worrying about the end of my term, 11-½ years hence. Neurotic and anxious, you say? Guilty as charged. But my worry was not without cause. It seemed to me then that I had been selected in a fairly random way; not that I wasn't qualified or appropriate, but that the process had



relied more on chance than on deliberate planning. I was committed to shifting that balance.

Succession planning became not only my first strategic priority, it became an obsession of sorts. The pleasures of being an editor are in no small measure related to the time-limited nature of the position (I feel for you, ye stagnant editors-for-life). I knew that having a systematic and organized approach to identifying and cultivating editorial talent from the start would be key to whatever my success or failure as an editor might be. To this end, I pursued several initiatives: 1) an endowed position for an Assistant Editor-in-Residence, to give sustained, in-depth editorial experience and mentorship to an early-career child and adolescent psychiatrist; 2) a program for early-career contributing editors that included elements of mentorship, skills development, and active participation in the development of key journal products; 3) a meritocratic and heterogeneous editorial board that plumbed the depth and breadth of editorial experience in the field and brought diverse skills and perspectives to the masthead; and 4) a group of senior handling editors who took on increased responsibility within the peer review process, served as advisors and ambassadors, and complemented and rounded out my own skill set (i.e., my many shortcomings).

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Over the years, this four-pronged approach enriched our talent pool and added rungs to the ladder of upward mobility. A decade later, it was gratifying and not at all fortuitous to see a new masthead resplendent with names I knew so well and had respected for so long—individuals who rose through the ranks. Mind you, their appointments were not my doing; their actions and their work (and yes, their manuscript-handling statistics) spoke on their behalf more loudly than I ever could.

### Embed Yourself in Experience: Never Worry Alone

Editors are made, not born. Even as I was developing new opportunities to help make the editors of the future, I too needed to secure mentorship and guidance for myself. This meant articulating, championing, embodying, and hoping to emulate a role model altogether new to me:

*I stumbled into editing, but my hope is that others may gravitate towards it in a more directed and deliberate way, and even that some of my younger peers may in fact wish to grow up to become editors. As a field, we have been successful in developing clinician-educators and clinician-scientists. It is my fervent hope that we may be well on our way to doing as much for a new phenotype of clinician-editors. It is an affiliation I am proud to call my own. Good scientific editing is a public service, and as such, a priority we are obligated to nurture in coming generations.<sup>1</sup>*

I assumed I would learn editing on the job, as I have learned so much else in life. Little did I know that not only can one learn a key set of editorial skills, but that one can go to editor school. Thank you, Council of Science Editors (CSE), for your Short Course for Journal Editors and thank you for providing a guide to us, the formerly perplexed and bewildered. The short course served me well, as has my decade-long affiliation with CSE and the many generous colleagues I have met through the Council. I understand that CSE is planning to expand its resources for journal editors, offering educational opportunities in new, accessible formats and locations. I applaud these efforts and am pleased to know that future generations of editors will benefit from an even greater host of supportive resources and benchmarks.

As a clinician-educator I make a point of teaching my trainees "Rule #1": *Never Worry Alone*. CSE provided me with a forum for never having to worry alone as an editor, and for that I am most grateful.

Part of setting the right conditions on my way out was to ensure that my successors were acquainted and familiar with CSE in a way I had not been at their stage. It was one of my ways of "paying it forward." The *Journal's* Assistant Editors-in-Residence continue to attend CSE's annual meeting once during their 2-year terms as part of their mentored exposure

to scholarly publishing, and my successor attended his first CSE meeting in May 2017. (*Disclosure: even beyond "acquainted and familiar" there is "immersed."* It has been a high point to see Mary Billingsley, ELS, my dear Managing Editor, rise from bright-eyed-and-bushtailed first-time CSE attendee to Vice President of the organization. Read on for a definition of BIRGing.)

### Overlap Generously: Make Sure You Do

A lengthy period of overlap between Editor-in-Chief and Editor-Elect was a true gift from our parent organization (whose absolute respect for editorial independence I must pause to salute). A full 18 months between the selection of the Editor-Elect and the end of my term provided ample time for collaborative planning and implementation; for the outgoing and incoming editorial teams to wind-down and gear-up, respectively, in measured, deliberate steps; for the institutional memory of the *Journal* to be passed on; for its pipelines and procedures to remain robust; and yes, even for some inevitable mourning and grief to take place.

Such a smooth transition would not have been possible were it not for the fact that our editorial office remained a constant. This had not always been so. Indeed, my second strategic priority upon being selected in 2006 was to ensure our office would no longer wander, changing homes every decade as it had before, but instead be permanently housed at the Academy's headquarters in Washington, DC. In retrospect, this was a natural evolution made possible by (then) relatively new electronic resources and opportunities. I do realize that I was blessed with a peerless editorial office team; for less fortunate editors, finding new staff may be the right solution, further making the case for a long period of overlap between teams.

Our stable and well-established editorial office ensured that the trains kept running on time, permitted the new editor full devotion to the work at hand, rather than to laying new tracks, staffing up, and training a fresh team. The office's close proximity to our parent organization and leadership provided another layer of support through established relationships and lines of communication. This outgoing editor in turn could rest assured that the same capable and responsible hands continued to lovingly care for the pages left behind.

### Retire Gracefully: Don't Overstay Your Welcome

The overlap is a period of transition. On your way out, be grateful for the privileged role with which you have been entrusted. Take stock of what your tenure has yielded. Feel proud, be content and satisfied.

But you do have a few remaining tasks. Clean your desk, be it real or virtual, and leave it tidy and ready for your successor. Make yourself available, but not on your

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terms—always on your successor's. Make sure they know that. It is a way of helping them take charge, of trusting them, and of letting them practice how to get help when they need it.

There is life after editing. Some will be keen to move on, while others may need a gentle nudge to depart, but depart we all must. Enjoy your emeritus status: you've earned it.

### Experience the Awe: Bask in Reflected Glory

If you have planted your garden well, your harvest will be abundant. As I prepared to move on, I felt elated and fulfilled, not so much by the impact factor (healthy as it was), by the many doors that editing opened, or by the intellectual rewards I reaped; rather, it was by seeing how a discipline dedicated to easing the suffering of children continues to evolve and mature, and by witnessing the blossoming of so much human talent and commitment in our academic journal.

Our trustworthy friends at Wikipedia define the classic social psychology verb (née concept) of BIRGing (Basking In Reflected Glory) as

*a self-serving cognition whereby an individual associates [him/her]self with known successful others, such that the winner's success becomes the individual's own accomplishment. The affiliation of another's success is enough to stimulate self-glory.*<sup>2</sup>

For the past two years, I have proudly cheered from the stands as my successor and good friend Doug Novins took on this labor of love. Mary Billingsley kept the trains running on time. And I have BIRGed away over the two of them, their fabulous new team, and our beloved *Journal* as I have settled into a new chapter of my life.

### References and Links

1. Martin A. World of wordcraft: on scientific editing. *Acad Psychiatry*. 2014;38(1):86-89. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40596-013-0028-0>.
2. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Basking\\_in\\_reflected\\_glory](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Basking_in_reflected_glory).

#### The Editor

The editor stood fore (sic) the heavenly gate,  
his features pinched and cold.  
He bowed before the man of fate,  
seeking admission to the fold.  
"What have you done" St. Peter asked,  
"to gain admission here?"  
"I was the journal's editor, sir,  
for many a weary year."  
The pearly gates swung open wide  
as Peter pressed the bell.  
"Come in and choose your harp." he cried.  
"You've had your share of hell!"

---Anonymous

(submitted by Barbara Meyers Ford)