

PREFACE

We spent three years working on this writing project prior to the release of the first edition in 2021, and during that time, we had only had a working title: the “Cookbook.” That nickname perfectly portrayed what we were intending to accomplish—to create a guide that shows, 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 a new lawyer who needs a thorough guide to preparing a case, as well as a 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.

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 the first edition book during the Trump years meant a lot of distractions that challenged our ability to stay on track. Not to mention a little pandemic. The Biden years may not have stressed out immigration lawyers as much, but they’re proving to be filled with change as well. So, here we are. In the 2021 edition, I wrote about implementing the Cookbook’s systems as a part of a new post-Covid, post-Trump era for our law practices. I still believe that’s true.

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 the Cookbook’s first edition. Happily, when we embarked upon this project with AILA, we had already planned for regularly updated editions with additional chapters. For 2023, we are adding chapters on T visas, H-2B visas, and humanitarian parole, a subject that has become more important with the introduction of new parole programs for Ukrainians as well as Cubans, Haitians, Nicaraguans, and Venezuelans. We hope our new readers will like what they see, and we thank those of you who liked the first two editions and are now hooked and will be buying this book again. I think you’ll find it well worth the investment.

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 and which are being shaped by the recent advances in artificial intelligence. I'm pleased to report that this project is well under way.

Greg Siskind
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