

The Real Benefits of Pro Bono Services



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By Kyle J. LaBuff

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It is recommended that attorneys contribute 50 hours a year to pro bono services. That equates to less than one hour per week. I get it. Life can get in the way. Children, an upcoming big trial, the simple desire to spend a Saturday afternoon Netflixing.

But pro bono work doesn't *just* help those that you serve; it helps you too. Perhaps more than you even realize.

Simply by volunteering, one can decrease the risk of depression, loneliness, and anxiety, and it doesn't stop there; volunteering can also lower blood pressure and extend one's longevity.¹ It can also increase happiness through the "feel-good, do-good effect."² In other words, there is a correlation between happy people and helpful people. The Baltimore Experience Corp Study found there were social, physical, and cognitive improvements in those who volunteer.³

Reality check, my fellow attorneys—do you know the statistics of how many in our profession struggle with depression, anxiety, and substance abuse? Would you believe that "28 percent of attorneys struggle with some level of depression and 19 percent show symptoms of anxiety?"⁴ Pro bono work is an easy, pill-free way to combat this challenge facing our profession!

For those fresh out of law school, or interested in changing the substantive law they practice, volunteering is a great way to get experience. Especially since the Great Recession, legal service organizations, bar associations, and other nonprofits are in need of help. Oftentimes, there are programs that actually work *around* business hours. Statewide Legal Services of Connecticut offers Call4Law, allowing volunteers to speak to those in need over the phone during a time that is not going to conflict with their work hours. There are also so many avenues of jurisprudence that you can pick one you want to grow and learn in. This thus builds confidence and provides experience. Also, if you want to learn how to litigate, there are many

organizations that, under supervision, would love to provide cases for young attorneys to learn courtroom skills.

It goes without saying that pro bono work is advertising for your firm or organization. Clients are going to remember the effort you put in to making their lives easier; they may not have hard times forever. In addition, the clients you helped will also be promotion through word of mouth. This is a very cheap (and rewarding) form of publicity.

A lawyer walks into a bar...How many lawyers does it take to change a lightbulb? Pick the lawyer joke—I know you've heard over a hundred of them. Former Dean of the University of Dayton School of Law, Paul McGreal, would make the comment that how we, as attorneys, were the profession that wrote the Constitution. What happened? How did we get to this point? One of the best ways to rebuild the credibility of our profession is through pro bono services. A ten minute Google search of organizations in your area in need of pro bono lawyers will provide several options to help provide that experience you crave, increase your mental and physical wellness, and will help the reputation of our profession. Perhaps we owe our pro bono services not only to those in need, but for the sake of our own wellness. **CL**

Notes

1. *Harvard Health Blog*, "Volunteering May Be Good for Body and Mind," by Stephanie Watson.
2. "Pursuing Human Strengths: A Positive Psychology," by Martin Bolt.
3. *Harvard Health Blog*, "The Many Ways Volunteering is Good for Your Heart," by Julie Corliss.
4. *Chicago Tribune*, "High Rates of Alcohol Abuse, Depression Among U.S. Attorneys, Study Says," by Alexia Elejalde-Ruiz.