

Eight Reasons to Stop Hiding From Your Pro Bono Coordinator and Sign Up for Pro Bono Opportunities



By Ndidi N. Moses

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In every publication of *Connecticut Lawyer*, the Connecticut Bar Association publishes an article authored by a member of the bar, encouraging other CBA members to sign up for a pro bono opportunity. Most attorneys have settled somewhere between leading the charge to sign colleagues up for pro bono opportunities, and hiding under their desks when the pro bono coordinator comes by with the sign-up sheet. If you are in the group of people who still need convincing that pro bono work is good for you, your professional development, and your community, we dedicate this article to you—so here are eight reasons why you should do pro bono work.

No Haggling About the Bill

Most lawyers will agree that getting a client to pay a bill can be more stressful than providing the legal representation itself. Assisting pro bono clients removes this source of stress. Instead of worrying about billing hours and documenting your time, you can focus your attention on other more important matters, like representing your client. Besides, the real reward is the positive difference you can make in someone's life. This is not to say that you will not get any monetary compensation by anyone. In fact, depending on the type of case, if successful, many pro bono attorneys may recoup their legal fees from their opponent at the conclusion of the case.

A Good Rollercoaster Ride

From the time you take on a pro bono case until its conclusion, your emotions can shift from excitement, to outright fear. But, by the end of the experience, you will have a strong sense of accomplishment and pride for being able to complete a task that many refused to undertake. Indeed, the first time I handled a pro bono case, it felt like that first drop on the rollercoaster ride, when your stomach falls out of your body. I had the feeling of looking out over the entire theme park, appreciating for the first time the gravity of what I had taken on, and while panicking on the inside, I tried to keep calm on the outside. The fear quickly subsided because I became so engrossed in the pro bono case that I had very little time to think about my own fears. I found myself focusing more on doing a good job for my client. Before I knew it, the case was over, that feeling of fear had melted into a sense of accomplishment and pride, and I was signing up for another pro bono opportunity.

Contentment and Satisfaction

Studies show that those who help others feel a sense of accomplishment and self-worth causes them to be happier, and take better care of themselves. In addition, there are surveys that show that lawyers who do public service work are happier lawyers. Undoubtedly, it is because pro bono work gives lawyers a sense of accomplishment and pride. You are making a difference in someone's life, and that feeling can be transformative.

Better Lawyer and Citizen

Pro bono work is an excellent source of professional development for lawyers. It forces lawyers out of their comfort zones, allowing them to sharpen their skills, and introduces them to new legal issues, theories, and experiences. Pro bono cases encourage lawyers to think creatively and craft novel resolutions for their clients' unique issues. This is because pro bono clients are from a diverse cross section of our society, with unique backgrounds, and layered legal problems. Unraveling the legal issues can feel like a law school exam, but it gives attorneys the opportunity to sharpen their legal skills. Whether it's being able to actually interact with one's client directly, first chair a trial, or argue before a judge, for junior lawyers, pro bono cases provide the chance for hands on experience they often cannot get elsewhere. This is mostly because, unlike paying clients, pro bono clients tend to be more flexible with who works on the file.

Brownie Points from Judges

Judges will remember you and appreciate you for your services. The rising cost of legal services has many citizens representing themselves. The large number of pro se litigants puts a tremendous burden on the judicial system, especially judges and their law clerks. Front line judicial staff members are also forced to take on the responsibility of helping pro se litigants navigate the legal process, while not crossing the line into offering legal advice. It is a delicate balancing act, and one that can be alleviated by a lawyer's offer to represent a litigant pro bono.

Someone's Hero

The legal system is a confusing and daunting place for lawyers. So you can imagine how intimidating the legal process must be for pro

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Time to Go Pro Bono (Continued from page 33)

se litigants. Very few people arrive at the point of self-representation willingly. Often times, there is a complicated story that preceded the decision to represent oneself. This story is normally filled with tales of frustration and feelings of desperation. Self-representation is often the last resort. When a lawyer enters the case, the lawyer becomes the hero because the lawyer can reduce the client's anxiety and stress by guiding them through the legal process and helping them obtain a favorable result.

One Step Closer To Stardom

Think about how moving Atticus Finch was in *To Kill a Mocking Bird*, or Thurgood Marshall in *Marshall*. Inadequate legal assistance is the leading cause of injustice in our society. Lawyers can help uncover massive injustices and latent legal issues in our society by representing underprivileged clients. When these injustices are revealed, the lawyer who reveals them paves the way for real change in our society. Moreover, the lawyer who blazed this trail of change can become the face of social movements to continue to effectuate change.

It's the Right Thing to Do, and It's Easy to Get Started

The CBA and American Bar Association have a program called, Free Legal Answers, an online pro bono initiative. It is a virtual legal advice clinic for low-income Connecticut residents. It is also an easy way to get started doing pro bono work. To find more about Free Legal Answers, contact the CBA, or visit ctbar.org/FreeLegalAnswers. **CL**

Supreme Deliberations (Continued from page 35)

trivializing the situation in a phone call (rather than a police radio call that would have alerted others) to the dispatcher, providing the dispatcher an inaccurate report,

and apparently lying to the dispatcher about their ability to leave the boat.

How did the majority respond to Justice Eveleigh's analysis? By pointing out that any claim that the imminent harm arose from something other than the storm (such as from White, herself) was not properly before the court. Because it was "undisputed that the plaintiff's claim—as advanced in the trial court, in the Appellate Court and in this court—consistently has been that the defendants should have been aware that White was exposed to a serious risk of harm from the storm," the majority deemed it improper to address an argument first raised at such a late date. (Emphasis in original.)

To be sure, reading the description about what the constables did—and didn't do—on the evening of June 18, 2008, made our blood boil. But, to its credit, the majority confined itself to the claims raised by the parties, separated bad facts from the law, and reached the outcome compelled by precedent. **CL**

Highlights (Continued from page 37)

Neither attorneys' fees incurred in defending any law suit, nor fees incurred to prosecute a CUTPA claim, constitute a "loss of money or property" within the meaning of CUTPA; therefore, neither type of damages may be relied upon to satisfy the "ascertainable loss of money or property" element of a CUTPA claim. *Saporoso v. Connective Wireless, Inc.*, 66 CLR 25 (Shapiro, Robert B., J.).

Unemployment Compensation

A trial court lacks the authority to vacate a decision by the Employment Security Board of Review to dismiss an appeal from a denial of an application for employment benefits made on the procedural grounds that the applicant had failed to call in to the Employment Security Appeals Office to initiate a scheduled telephone hearing. *Cousins v. Administrator*, Unemployment Compensation

Act, 65 CLR 670 (Ecker, Steven D., J.). The applicant in this case claims to have mistakenly believed that the call would be initiated by the Division and waited two days before following up to determine why the hearing had not been held. The application was summarily denied based on the Division's general practice of denying all appeals following an applicant's failure to attend a scheduled hearing unless a request to open is made on the same day as the scheduled hearing.

Workers' Compensation Law

King v. Volvo Excavators, AB, 65 CLR 8 (Cole-Chu, Leeland J., J.), holds that the 2017 amendment to the Products Liability Statute eliminating the exclusion of claimants entitled to receive workers' compensation benefits from the Act's general ten-year repose period and substituting instead the Act's fixed ten-year statute of repose, P.A. 17-97, amending Conn. Gen. Stat. § 52-577a(c), does not apply retroactively to injuries incurred before the Act's October 1, 2017 effective date. Note, however, that while it appears that the amendment was intended to increase the statute of repose for workers' compensation benefits, it may have reduced the period in situations in which a product's "useful life" is less than ten years.

Zoning

Statements made during a public hearing on a zoning permit application are subject to the absolute litigation privilege. *Priore v. Haig*, 65 CLR 787 (Povodator, Kenneth B., J.). The opinion holds that statements made by a citizen challenging the credibility of the applicant are absolutely privileged.

An ordinance allowing "customary home occupations carried on entirely within the dwelling unit" applies only if all phases of a business occur within the confines of a residence. *Watson v. Glastonbury ZBA*, 65 CLR 587 (Domnarski, Edward S., J.). The opinion holds that such an ordinance does not authorize the use of a home office to manage a business which has activities occurring at remote locations. **CL**