



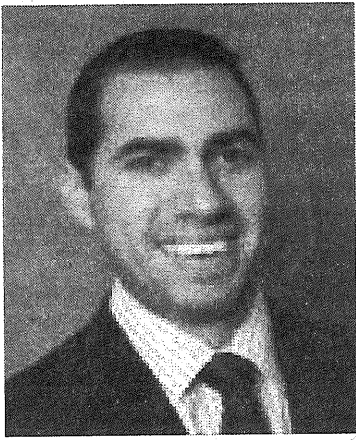
NEWS FROM THE CHICAGO BAR ASSOCIATION

Report

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The CBA's & The CBF's 10th Anniversary Celebration of Pro Bono Week

The Pros of Pro Bono Work



By Brandon Peck

Young and experienced attorneys alike maintain a hectic schedule between their current clients, potential clients, networking obligations and personal lives. The perception of many attorneys these days is that taking the time to participate in pro bono activities is a worthy cause, but they simply do not have the time or flexibility to spend handling pro bono cases. While helping your community is undoubtedly the number one goal of performing pro bono work, many attorneys gloss over the positives that undertaking pro bono work can do for their career and for themselves as individuals.

Many attorneys who undertake pro bono activities often view these experiences as some of the most gratifying work they have performed, a source of personal satisfaction and pride. The misconception that as a busy young attorney you don't have time to participate in pro bono opportunities needs to be eliminated. The majority of pro bono opportunities require only a minimal time commitment and almost all organizations are willing to work with the attorneys' schedules so they can become as involved as their schedules permit.

What can pro bono work do for your career? Putting aside the recognition and awards you might receive for your service, the value of pro bono work for your career is infinite. Whether you are looking for your first job, looking for a new job, or happy with your current job, dedicating your time to pro bono work is extremely valuable on a number of levels. First, as a practicing attorney, the firsthand experience you can gain by

performing pro bono work provides you with a leg up on your competition. The positive results may come from gained experience leading a case, enhanced personal communication skills, improved trial skills, new business and new professional contacts.

Further, as a young lawyer looking for your first job or looking for a new job, you will find that many interviews include a question about what type of community service or pro bono work you do in your free time. If you are attempting to impress a potential employer and your answer to this question is "none," what you are really telling that employer is that you do not have time to help those around you and in your community; an attitude that is not likely to help your employment prospects.

Whether you are volunteer in a transactional clinic to help small businesses, volunteer to draft estate plans or volunteer to represent individuals in civil litigation, the simple fact is this: until you showed up, that individual was on their own. As attorneys, we have a distinct skill set that can make a difference in someone's life at every stage of our legal careers. What you chose to do with that skill set is up to you; but many would argue that helping only yourself is contrary to our sworn duty as attorneys.

Sharpen Your Skills

The fact is that pro bono opportunities allow you not only to help your career and your community, but they help you become a better lawyer and a better person. The satisfaction gained from helping individuals who would be lost without your assistance is an unparalleled feeling. On a day-to-day basis many young attorneys will not receive the "thank you" from a client or the smile of approval that they deserve. However, undertaking pro bono work allows that attorney the kind of hands-on legal work that might get them that simple, "thank you for your help" that so many lawyers do without.

One pro bono experience of mine stands out above the others, not because I got that smile and thank you, but because of the genuine appreciation that was expressed by the individuals I was able to help. While volunteering for a local pro bono organization, I was given the

opportunity to serve as the Guardian Ad Litem in a pro se minor guardianship case.

Upon my review of the file, it was apparent that a number of issues had yet to be resolved by the pro se petitioner, preventing my ability to fulfill my duties as Guardian Ad Litem. In this instance, both the Court and the pro bono organization graciously gave me full latitude to assist the pro se petitioner in completing the paperwork necessary for her to petition for guardianship of her disabled daughter.

Upon completion of the paperwork with the minor's mother, as the Guardian Ad Litem I went out to the family home to meet the minor. The fact that I already established a relationship with the family by simply helping them with paperwork was apparent the moment I arrived. The family was waiting for me on the porch of the home and from my observations, must have spent hours cleaning the home and preparing for my arrival. I sat with the family and the minor while they explained that the minor suffered from Wildervanck syndrome, a rare genetic disorder that primarily affects one's ability to learn and communicate. The family explained in great detail the minor's general cognitive abilities including that the minor would not know her birthday, age, year or season, but would know that it is cold or hot outside. Further, they told me that the minor had a limited vocabulary and difficulty speaking, particularly with the pronunciation of specific names and, as such, the minor had come up with nicknames for her family members.

After speaking with the minor alone, I again sat with the family while they told me about the history of their home and the history of their family living in Chicago. My visit to the family's home concluded with a guided tour by both of the minor's parents. The genuine appreciation expressed by the family and the satisfaction I received from knowing that the family truly appreciated my assistance still resonates with me to this very day.

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