

The Legal Intelligencer

THE OLDEST LAW JOURNAL IN THE UNITED STATES 1843 - 2021

PHILADELPHIA, THURSDAY, JUNE 3, 2021

An **ALM** Publication

YOUNG

YL

LAWYER

The Many Benefits of Pro Bono for Young Lawyers

BY DAVID C. HAMILTON

Special to the Legal

“Without payment” or “free of charge” are the words that most attorneys commonly associate with pro bono work. Yet, pro bono is short for the Latin phrase *pro bono publico*, which means “for the public good.” Rather than considering pro bono work based on how it impacts a firm’s bottom line, young lawyers have the opportunity to reshape the meaning of the commonly used term to place a bigger emphasis on the important aid an attorney is able to provide through this kind of work.

While pro bono work may not always be the most glamorous, it’s often notably impactful on one’s career. As a young lawyer, I have asked seasoned lawyers about some of the most significant moments of their career, and many have noted the pro bono work they have done. In the family law field, pro bono work can illuminate for attorneys what it means to represent a client in dire need of protection and stability in their daily lives.

Here are four additional reasons why young lawyers should welcome pro bono work:

- **It’s the right thing to do.**

Pro bono work is an opportunity to do good in the world. Many low-income individuals have legal problems, both big and small. Pro bono work provides access to the legal system for many low-income people who otherwise would have their issues ignored. If more young lawyers contributed their time to pro bono work, they could help decrease the amount of unmet legal needs of low-income individuals.

- **It’s good training.**

Pro bono work provides an opportunity for immediate, meaningful client interactions. Unlike my area of family law, many young associates who work in large civil litigation firms rarely get to interact with clients their first year as they are isolated in the back office with



DAVID C. HAMILTON
is a family law attorney in Bucks County at Williams Family Law. Learn more about his practice by visiting www.bucksfamilylawyers.com

minimal interaction. With pro bono work, those same young lawyers could have the chance to interact with clients directly.

Those first few interactions provide a wealth of important learning experiences for young lawyers. Pro bono work is an opportunity to develop foundational skills critical to a young lawyer’s career: active listening, face-to-face communication, and expectation management.

In addition, client interactions can be personally rewarding. Young lawyers have few other instances where they connect directly with a client who will be impacted by their work and likely with some immediacy.

For many young attorneys doing back-office work, they never get to have face-to-face contact with a client. Pro bono presents a unique opportunity for young lawyers to see first-hand the utility of their position as an attorney.

In this sense, pro bono work gives young lawyers opportunities they’d otherwise miss. In many firms, young lawyers are limited when it comes to litigation experience. While there are some young lawyers who “learn by doing,” many others never get the opportunity to do so within their own firms, as senior lawyers often take the lead in devising strategy, handling depositions, arguing motions, and sitting first chair at trial. As a young lawyer, the most obvious benefit that pro bono work offers is the opportunity to take the lead in all matters related to your client and the case, including trial.

With more and more cases settling or attorneys pursuing ADR (alternative dispute resolution), there are fewer opportunities for trial work. In turn, the

“In addition to the experience, pro bono work often provides opportunities for young lawyers to develop a broader understanding of the law and its interaction with society.”

amount of in-court experience for young lawyers is vastly reduced. Fortunately, a pro bono case offers a higher chance for young lawyers to earn first-hand trial experience.

While I’m not advocating pro bono purely for self-interested young litigators, it is an incidental benefit for those who also want to use their skills to help. When the practice of law puts a premium on experience, young lawyers have to seek out experience in whatever form possible.

In addition to the experience, pro bono work often provides opportunities for young lawyers to develop a broader understanding of the law and its interaction with society. Thus, pro bono work can help strengthen an attorney’s ability to effectively counsel their clients, regardless of payment.

- **It’s our professional obligation.**

As law students, we learned the Model Rules of Professional Conduct. Among the many enumerated rules that establish the standards related to a lawyer’s professional conduct including interactions with clients and duties owed to them, Model Rule 6.1 establishes a professional responsibility to provide pro bono service. Specifically, the Model Rule states that every lawyer has a professional responsibility to provide legal services to those unable to pay with the goal of rendering at least 50 hours of pro bono legal services per year.

Without the legal profession’s maintenance of the pro bono tradition, the poorest of our residents would be

further marginalized and even less able to cope with the many challenges they face on a day-to-day basis. With a legal profession full of competent and capable attorneys who want to help but might not know how to get involved, www.paprobono.net is a great resource for all Pennsylvania lawyers.

The website has a pro bono program directory that is a database of organizations and agencies that handles a broad range of legal issues. The most common areas are agencies that handle civil matters for indigent clients among other things: housing, government benefits, immigration, elder, and family law issues. If you’re interested in helping seniors, there are programs for helping elders with consumer issues, advanced health care directives, powers of attorney, and public benefits. There are also programs designed to help people with physical and mental disabilities. In addition, if the population you wish to serve falls under a new area of law to you, many agencies provide quality training and preparation for the impending work. And importantly, many established pro bono organizations will cover you under their malpractice insurance for the cases they assign you. If not, make sure you are covered under a malpractice insurance policy.

- **Finally, pro bono work is good for young lawyers, both professionally and personally.**

In addition to the reasons listed above, pro bono work helps young lawyers establish a valuable network of new attorneys they might not have otherwise interacted with in their line of work. While the thought of a new referral is enticing, the face of a satisfied client is even more rewarding.

Therefore, I encourage you to check out www.paprobono.net or your local bar association for more opportunities to get involved in pro bono work. •