

Pro Bono: The Legal Pick-Me-Up

This year has been undoubtedly difficult. The pandemic, civil unrest, a very emotional election season, endless uncertainty and anxiety. The world is a troubled place, but if you look through the right lens, it can also be a good place. With Thanksgiving a few weeks away, this is an apt time to pause and take stock of all the good we do and figure out a way to do more of it.



Jaffe Staff

Earlier this year, *Law360* published a report that lawyers from more than 100 firms contributed nearly 5 million hours to pro bono services. The publication of the article underscores the importance of pro bono work, the profession's commitment to such work and the benefits of a firm culture focused on doing good deeds.

Here are some reasons why your firm should consider investing more time and energy into building its pro bono program.

Encourages Diversity of Experience

Pro bono work frequently affords attorneys an opportunity to practice in an area of law that isn't their usual focus. For example, when partnering with a legal aid clinic, a firm receives a list of cases that need attorneys. A corporate litigator might work on a benefits case; an IP attorney might help someone with immigration status. Attorneys have the opportunity to brush up on law that they might not have considered since law school. Most find it rewarding, and sometimes even fun.

Provides an Opportunity for Collaboration

Along with opportunities to practice in areas outside their day-to-day work, pro bono cases also give attorneys the chance to work with other lawyers in their firms whom they may not otherwise know. That creates relationships and cross-firm opportunities in the future. It also helps attorneys build networks with other attorneys who are also working for legal aid foundations. That networking leads to business development, which also benefits the firm.

Appeals to New Recruits

When your firm is recruiting new attorneys, particularly from younger generations, those potential new members frequently ask about the firm's commitment to pro bono. You want to have at least a somewhat-active pro bono program if you hope to attract new talent in the next few years.

Builds Skills of Younger Lawyers

While we are talking about younger talent, pro bono helps young lawyers gain experience and build their skill sets. Tapping into younger lawyers' energy and desire to help others is a win-win.

Enhances the Firm's Reputation

Doing pro bono work is good for the firm's image. Nowadays, many if not most awards and recognitions for law firms require information about pro bono activity. If your firm can't say it provides this community service, the likelihood of receiving such honors takes a dive.

Provides a Sense of Self-Fulfillment

This may be the most-important aspect of pro bono. I have worked with many attorneys at firms varying in size from solo practitioners to AmLaw50, who say that helping others with their legal work makes them feel re-energized and recommitted to the law. Pro bono work frequently reminds attorneys that they are practicing law to help people. The energy frequently carries over into their regular practices as well.

And their clients? Pro bono work gives attorneys the opportunity to make their clients feel empowered and hopeful in situations that they thought were dire and hopeless.

Getting Started with Pro Bono

How can an attorney find pro bono work? It is usually as simple as a phone call to your **bar association** or local legal services agency. They know they are working with busy attorneys and have streamlined the process as much as possible to make it efficient and provide you with the necessary tools to help you get started.

If a commitment to pro bono is not possible for your law firm in the near future, consider making donations to legal aid foundations this year in lieu of sending traditional holiday gifts to your clients. It shows your clients that you appreciate them while also helping the underserved access legal counsel.

To discuss how **to make the most of your firm's pro bono program**, contact Vivian Hood at vhood@jaffepr.com.