HOW TO START – AND SUCCEED - AT PRO BONO FOR PARALEGALS!

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THANK YOU!

You are here because you are interesting in doing pro bono

Pro bono publico (Latin, for the public good): professional work undertaken voluntarily and without payment or at a reduced fee as a public service

TODAY'S WEBINAR

Finding the right opportunity

- What are you interested in?
- What is your situation?
- What work is available?
- Types of volunteer matters

A NOTE FOR PARALEGALS

- Opportunities for paralegals to play a role in probono service are on the rise.
- Only licensed lawyers can provide legal advice, but:
 - There are many important elements to delivering pro bono services that do not involve giving legal advice
 - A law license is not required to represent individuals in some types of administrative cases (e.g., social security)

WHY DO PRO BONO?

- You are needed
- Feels great to give back
- Great place to gain experience and skills
- Good way to network
- Excellent visibility in the community
 - For yourself, for your firm
- Other

PART 1: FIGURING OUT WHAT APPEALS TO YOU

FIGURING OUT WHAT YOU ARE INTERESTED IN

What appeals to you?

- Law school? College?
- Where do you donate money?
- What articles do you read in newspapers or magazines?
- Your life experiences?
- What are your passions?
- What types of clients/groups are you most drawn to help?

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- What are your plans and hopes for your career?
- What skills do you have that you would like to build on (substantive, procedural); what does your firm want you to build?
- What skills would you like to develop (substantive, procedural)?
- What experiences would you like to have? (jury trial, client contact, negotiation, drafting, etc.)
- What builds your resume?

WHERE ARE YOU MOST NEEDED?

- Your language capacity
- Your skill set (as a paralegal, before law)
- Impact work vs. working with individuals
- How to help children help grown-ups

TIME COMMITMENT

- What can you do work and family constraints
- Be realistic what happens if you back out
- Weighing the benefit to you, and to community, against your time pressures
- No time is perfect; making time creates time

TRANSACTIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

- Skills that make a difference: negotiating, reviewing docs
- Don't be afraid to step outside your comfort zone
- A chance to do something different while still using your skills
- Ease into it slowly

PART 2: WHAT ARE THE CONSTRAINTS, OPPORTUNITIES AND SYSTEMS OF YOUR CURRENT SITUATION?

SMALL FIRMS:

- Opportunity for getting training and mentoring
- Concerns:
 - Maybe less freedom to take things on
 - More time pressure from firm
 - Less need for training and experience perceived by firm
- Ideas for solutions
- Some ideas for professional development:
 - Chance to play a leadership role in pro bono within firm
 - Experience to advance what is important to firm?
 - Networking with court to be perceived as connected
 - Press recognition

LARGE FIRMS:

- Know the policy
- Know the pro bono counsel/coordinator
- Some professional development ideas:
 - Identify skills and experience you should build
 - If firm values leadership, find opportunities on boards or advisory boards, and recognition
 - Be aware of sensitive issues for firm (time, substantive issues, clients. conflicts and potential conflicts)
 - Corporate client partnerships
 - Chance to work with a lawyer you'd like to be mentored by
 - Visibility within a firm use the opportunity

IN-HOUSE LEGAL DEPARTMENTS:

- Know/negotiate the policy
- Concerns:
 - Maybe less freedom to take things on
 - Less law practice support or infrastructure
 - No malpractice insurance
 - No demand for litigation training
- Ideas for solutions
- If no in-house team, approach outside counsel and team up, or contact a well-supported legal services team
- Your biggest value is in attracting law firms and law firm partners
- Some professional development ideas:
 - Identify skills and experience you should build
 - Be aware of sensitive issues for company (time, substantive issues)
 - What are the corporation's CSR goals? Can you advance those goals with pro bono?
 - Build your network! It always helps.

PART 3: FINDING OUT WHAT WORK IS AVAILABLE

WHERE TO LOOK

- Online resources
 - www.probono.net
 - www.lawhelp.org
 - http://apps.americanbar.org/legalservices/probono/director y.html
 - www.lsc.gov
 - Poke around
- Word of mouth
- Ask a judge
- Local bar association
- Taking a case from an agency, vs. finding one yourself (neighbor, person on the street, employee of the firm)

ASK/BENEFITS OF WORKING WITH AN AGENCY

- Training available? (and check PLI website)
- What is the volunteer commitment?
- Screening of placed cases?
- Support once the case is placed?
 - Online
 - In person
 - Mentoring
 - Materials
- Run interference if a problem arises?
- Malpractice insurance
 - Primary to yours?

THINGS TO KNOW

- Once you take it, it's your case
- Don't expect handholding daily collect your questions
- Check the materials for the answer before you call for help
- If you feel out of your depth, ask for help right away
- Large firm folks check with Pro Bono Counsel

PART 4: OPTIONS IN TYPES OF VOLUNTEERING

IMPACT LITIGATION

Not your first case unless:

- You are in a large firm
- Others will be involved on a daily basis

If your goal is to do impact work, there are steps you can take to get there!

- Build a relationship with an impact organization
- In large firms, build relationships with lawyers who work on impact cases, or who serve on boards of impact orgs

Full scope cases (handle the case from start to finish)

- Government benefits: More writing, application of law to facts, makes big difference in income
- Immigration: life altering impact; trial opportunities
- Elder law: Advanced directives

LESS THAN FULL SCOPE

Limited scope

- One piece of the case (e.g. restraining order hearing but not future custody motions)
- One time only (e.g. one afternoon clinic)
- Approved in most states
- Clarity of scope is critical, and must be written down
- Self-Help
- Legal Information and Education (classes)

THANK YOU!

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