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

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THANK YOU!

You are here because you are interested 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 pro bono 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

Idea 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/directory.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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