

The unintended benefits of giving back

Legal service is generally not cheap. With hourly rates of \$200 (at the low end), there are entire populations who are unable to afford the services of a private attorney.

Fortunately, legal organizations tirelessly work to meet these needs within their respective communities. From Legal Aid to pro bono clinics, good hearted attorneys donate their time and energy to helping people through the maze of the legal system.

Giving back comes with obvious benefits, like the warm fuzzies you get when you help a family stay in their home. But there are also professional benefits, particularly for new attorneys.

Developing your skills

Giving back to the community gives you a unique opportunity to develop your practice skills in a low pressure environment. Not that the outcome of the case is any less important, but the pressure of handling a \$200 small claims matter is significantly lower than the pressure of handling a multi-million dollar litigation case. Use these opportunities to study the relevant laws, learn the local court rules and sharpen your client communication skills.

Pro bono service also provides a great opportunity to try out different practice areas before committing to one. Clinics routinely offer representation in domestic relations, small claims, disability law and taxation. By trying out a few different areas, you can better determine your best fit.

Networking

Community service also offers an excellent opportunity for networking and meeting other professionals within the legal community. Seasoned attorneys are often assigned as mentors to younger lawyers within pro bono programs. Ask questions, contribute ideas and use this opportunity to form lasting professional relationships. Depending on the practice area, your pro bono work may also put you in communication with judges, clerks, and other court personnel. A positive impression now could pay off for your practice for years to come.

Marketing

Every client interaction is an opportunity to showcase your talents and earn new business. Even if your pro bono client has no financial resources, he may have a wealthy friend who is looking for an attorney to handle a business transaction. Being out in the community is like free advertising. Make it known that you are accepting new matters and ask your clients for referrals, especially if you were able to secure the outcome they wanted. Just remember that you are a constant representation of your law practice, so make sure that you are representing well.

Community service is not only good for your heart, but can also prove good for your mind, your skills and your future profits. Take the time to find out about the pro bono services in your area and use these opportunities to give to others, while also helping your budding practice.

About Erika Winston:

Erika Winston is a Virginia based writer with a passion for all things legal. As a former domestic relations attorney, she understands the challenge of determining the best fee structure for your practice. Erika is a regular contributor to [TimeSolv](#) and a variety of other publications.