

How Pro Bono Work Can Strengthen A Law Firm

By **Shams Merchant** (March 28, 2024)

When asking a lawyer what the expression "pro bono" means, there may be a few different answers, as there is no one agreed-upon definition of what constitutes pro bono work.

In the simplest sense, pro bono work is when a lawyer or law firm provides their services at no or very low cost. Law firms across the world engage in hundreds of thousands of hours of pro bono work each year.

So, if law firms do not make money from doing pro bono work, why do most of the largest law firms in the world participate in, and more often than not, encourage their lawyers to take on such work?



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There are several advantages for law firms that actively engage in pro bono work.

Attracting Clients

Participation in pro bono work can enhance a law firm's reputation and demonstrate its commitment to social responsibility and community service. This can lead to positive publicity and an improved reputation in the competitive legal market.

It is particularly important with respect to acquiring and retaining clients. Today, clients are increasingly aware of the social causes and service initiatives their outside counsel is involved in and prefer to engage firms that are active in giving back to their communities.

Prospective clients may find a law firm more attractive than a competitor if that law firm is known for its pro bono work around a particular topic. It demonstrates the firm's commitment to the broader community and may align with the values of such potential clients.

Pro bono work can distinguish a law firm from its competitors, serving as a unique selling point that sets the firm apart in a positive light.

Seeking out pro bono activities can also build trust and loyalty among existing clients. They may perceive the firm as one that values fairness, justice and serving the community, which can positively influence their perception of the firm.

By involving existing clients in pro bono initiatives or seeking their input on potential pro bono projects, law firms can enhance client engagement and foster a sense of shared purpose and community involvement.

Attracting Talent

Aside from competition to acquire and retain clients, law firms today also face strong competition in recruiting and retaining talent. Engaging in pro bono work can be instrumental in attracting and retaining talent within a law firm.

Pro bono work can provide valuable opportunities for skill development, networking and

professional growth.

By participating in pro bono work, lawyers can gain experience in different areas of law, work with clients from different backgrounds, and develop their advocacy and communication skills.

It can also provide opportunities for lawyers to network with other lawyers, judges and community leaders, which can lead to new business opportunities and referrals.

Pro bono work can also contribute to the attraction and retention of talent within firms in a few different ways.

Professional Development

First and foremost, by providing their lawyers with access to pro bono projects, firms can contribute to a lawyer's professional development from the outset.

One of the most important factors in a lawyer's assessment of a law firm is its commitment to career development. Law firms can offer tremendous career development opportunities by cultivating strong and robust pro bono programs.

Pro bono work offers lawyers the opportunity to work on diverse cases, gain valuable experience and develop skills outside their usual practice areas. This can be appealing to both new and experienced lawyers seeking opportunities for growth and learning.

Moreover, pro bono work often involves mentoring and training opportunities, allowing experienced lawyers to pass on their knowledge and skills to junior associates, which can be attractive to new lawyers and laterals seeking mentorship and career development from seasoned partners at their firm.

Additionally, pro bono work can provide avenues for younger associates to take on leadership roles within their firm or in collaborative efforts with other legal professionals, nonprofit organizations and advocacy groups.

Associates can use these opportunities to showcase their talent and cultivate their brand as they move up through the ranks at their respective firms.

Firm Culture

Pro bono work can be a great way to create a compelling firm culture. Culture is buzz word that law firms use frequently to describe their unique work environment. Offering a robust pro bono program is just one way that law firms can stand out from their competitors.

Providing opportunities for lawyers to engage in pro bono work can provide lawyers with a sense of purpose and fulfillment, contributing to higher job satisfaction and overall well-being in the workplace.

Many lawyers choose the law to give back to society and if law firms can specifically address a lawyer's purpose, a firm's retention rate will increase at a time when the talent wars continue.

Recognizing that well-being is a crucial component to developing a firm culture that aligns with the personal values of its lawyers is not only good for the lawyers, but good for

business.

Lawyers who feel satisfied are more likely to produce better work product and increase billings. Demonstrating a commitment to pro bono work signals to potential hires that the firm values social responsibility, justice and community service.

Promoting Access to Justice

While creating a sustainable pro bono program can be an effective method for law firms to differentiate themselves, acquire and retain clients, and recruit and retain the best talent, it is vital that we do not forget the importance of the obvious need for pro bono work as a critical piece of a properly functioning legal system.

Our system of law depends on equal access to the privileges and protections it provides, and those without means deserve competent representation. Firms that offer pro bono services help fill the ever-increasing gap for those who need legal services but cannot afford it.

Because nonprofit organizations and legal services agencies cannot keep up with the demand, it is up to private law firms and corporate legal departments to fill in the gaps to meet the legal needs of underserved communities.

Conclusion

Engaging in pro bono work can benefit law firms, individual lawyers and the broader community.

It can enhance a law firm's reputation, build trust and loyalty among clients, provide valuable opportunities for skill development and professional growth, and fulfill ethical obligations to provide legal services to those in need.

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