

October 9, 2012

Is Pro-Bono Connected to Marketing and Business Development?

I was fortunate enough to speak at a recent Legal Marketing Association event in Los Angeles. The agenda was divided into themes. My group's theme was "Think Different." Michael Freeborn, founding partner of Chicago's Freeborn & Peters law firm was of my fellow speakers. Mr. Freeborn talked about how we can all change the world, using examples of how his firm gets heavily involved in pro bono work throughout their community.

In my opinion Mr. Freeborn was one of the day's most engaging and inspiring speakers. His presentation reminded me to point out there are at least two hidden marketing and business development "wins" associated with performing pro bono work.

There are several organizations, citywide, regional and national that provide legal services to individuals and families that need legal help but are unable to pay. Here are a few I have dealt with in the past from here in the San Francisco Bay Area:

Legal Aid Society - Employment Law Center <http://www.las-elc.org/>
Silicon Valley Campaign for Legal Services <http://www.svcls.org/>
SFCASA - Court Appointed Special Advocates <http://www.sfcasa.org/>
Law Foundation of Silicon Valley <http://www.lawfoundation.org/>
East Bay Community Law Center <http://www.ebclc.org/index.php>
Various Bar Associations' VLSP programs

Listen, it's not like there is a shortage of individuals, families and other groups that could use legal aid but cannot afford the help. As we are helping people in need there is a line that we don't want to cross - the line of bragging about doing charitable work. That is not what I am talking about here. I am talking about a few benefits you may think about when deciding to get involved.

One hidden benefit of doing these good things is that you and your firm are exposed to several referral sources throughout the year. For instance, you will work with a family in court to help them get their papers in order so the parents can legally work and rent an apartment. You will likely be working with other attorneys from other firms in this kind of case.

Secondly, many of these organizations have fundraisers, auctions, galas and other celebrations at least once a year. When you become involved with these groups and their events you and your firm will not only be exposed to fellow attorneys from firms around your town, but these events almost always have in-house counsel from the legal departments of Fortune 500 companies. What better way to introduce yourself to a decision maker from a large company whose business you would love to have? In a charitable and giving setting, the feelings of goodwill extinguish any of the sales pressure you may find at any other situation.

Lastly, in a client service context, when your firm sponsors one of these events you will receive space at tables. Take advantage of these spots at the tables as they are perfect opportunities to invite your best clients and prospects. Not only that, the chicken will be great!