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New Lawyers Gain Valuable Experience From Community Service

Giving back to the community is one of the most rewarding activities I have done thus far in my young legal career. I have volunteered at local community centers, churches and free legal clinics.

By **Garrett Field** | January 22, 2020



Garrett Field of Goldberg, Miller and Rubin. (Photo: Courtesy Photo)

Giving back to the community is one of the most rewarding activities I have done thus far in my young legal career. I have volunteered at local community centers, churches and free legal clinics. When I attended these events, I began by meeting clients with a variety of legal questions. I then analyzed their cases and gave them advice on how they should proceed with their matter. It is sometimes difficult as a new lawyer to get courtroom experience, meet clients and evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of potential claims. Of course, starting out, young lawyers are not going to trial every day and do not have a large network of legal contacts.

However, community service exposed me to new practice areas, gave me great hands-on experiences evaluating cases, and helped me meet other attorneys and people in the community who were dedicated to making positive changes in the area. When I volunteered at free legal clinics, I was exposed to family, tax, tort and property law and was able to interact with clients and evaluate cases. On top of feeling proud after being able to help others with my legal knowledge, I was able to conduct legal research, gain confidence in talking to clients, network with other attorneys and clients, and obtain valuable courtroom experience. Community service brings countless benefits to the community and is a duty of the legal profession; however, it can also be beneficial to young lawyers in a variety of ways.

Engaging in community service sharpens a lawyer's skills in whatever area they are volunteering. Volunteering also helps new attorneys get exposed to a variety of practice areas, learn new legal terminology, see a wide variety of cases, become more efficient in their legal analyses and improve their strategic planning on how to best achieve their client's legal goals. These are all skills that can make a young attorney more confident and well-rounded while allowing them to be a better employee at their firm or help build their new solo practice.

Young lawyers who participate in community service become a more valuable member of the legal community as a whole. Participating in community service, of course, benefits the community, but provides countless benefits to young lawyers beyond the community, including individually benefiting their careers and making them more valuable members of the firms where they work.

Individual Benefits

Community service allows young lawyers to build on their existing legal skills. Many times, new lawyers are tasked with beginning-level assignments their first couple of years and struggle to get practical legal experience. However, community service allows a new lawyer to take charge of a case or legal matter from start to finish and can provide valuable confidence in their abilities as an attorney. Volunteering also increases organizational and management skills. Young lawyers who participate in community service will gain experience in balancing multiple projects, scheduling events, and liaising with other organizations or clients. Starting a volunteer group or a new community service event can also demonstrate leadership and help earn trust in a young lawyer's current job. If a new lawyer does well at a pro bono clinic while working with other experienced attorneys, they could eventually receive referrals in the future from those attorneys.

Most importantly, networking opportunities stem from every positive encounter an attorney has, and young lawyers starting out can volunteer and get their names out into the legal community by participating in community service. The most effective way to expand a lawyer's network and bring in clients is to be out there and have people start to recognize the lawyer. These relationships turn into potential clients, sources of business and referrals.

Benefits to Their Firm

Volunteering with other members of your firm promotes positivity among co-workers and can increase job satisfaction. Lawyers who participate in community service with their firm feel proud to work in a firm that takes this kind of community work seriously. Also, volunteering with a group of attorneys from the same firm can bring together co-workers that do not usually get to work together and can also help young lawyers find common interests they have outside of the office with their colleagues. Involvement in community service work further sends a strong message about a firm's values, and if a law firm changes someone's life, they are more likely to come to that firm when they have legal issues.

These benefits to a firm or employer can be achieved early on by young lawyers who participate in community service. Young lawyers who volunteer stand out from their peers and those that take the initiative with these projects can demonstrate their valuable skills to their employers.

Donna Gerson, associate dean for career strategies at Drexel University's Kline School of Law and a member of the Free Library of Philadelphia Foundation's board of directors, had this to say on the topic: "New lawyers benefit from community service on many levels. You have the opportunity to learn from others and understand the needs of the community. In addition, you gain valuable leadership skills through civic engagement. Community service enables you to meet new colleagues, mentors and perhaps future clients. Most importantly, though, giving back through community service is part of a life well-lived and a duty of the legal profession."

Getting Started

So how should young lawyers go about getting involved in their community?

There are thousands of nonprofit organizations in the area. Young lawyers can choose to be a part of any of these organizations and help address relevant issues for the community or volunteer at free pro bono clinics to help lower-income clients. Court-sponsored volunteer attorney programs also have opportunities for lawyers. The benefits of volunteering with these programs include broadening your legal expertise, getting to know other lawyers and court personnel from the region, and lawyers can volunteer on a schedule that conveniently fits with their work schedule.

There are also volunteer opportunities outside of the law, which could have some added benefits, like meeting people with different perspectives on issues in the community. While volunteering, new lawyers can meet people from all different walks of life. New lawyers never know when someone will need or want their services. New attorneys can build a presence that will benefit them years later as potential clients will remember them from the volunteering and will seek out their professional services.

Bottom line, lawyers should provide legal services to the disadvantaged and the underrepresented. Not only does it help others and is a great thing to do, but it will also give new lawyers a leg up when building a network and presence in their community. Volunteering pushes new lawyers to talk to prospective clients, gain valuable courtroom experience and enhance their skills, all while positively impacting the lives of others.

Garrett Field *is an associate at Goldberg, Miller & Rubin's Philadelphia office. His practice primarily focuses on general liability, automotive negligence and premises liability cases.*

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