

The Value to the Solo Practitioner of Performing Pro Bono

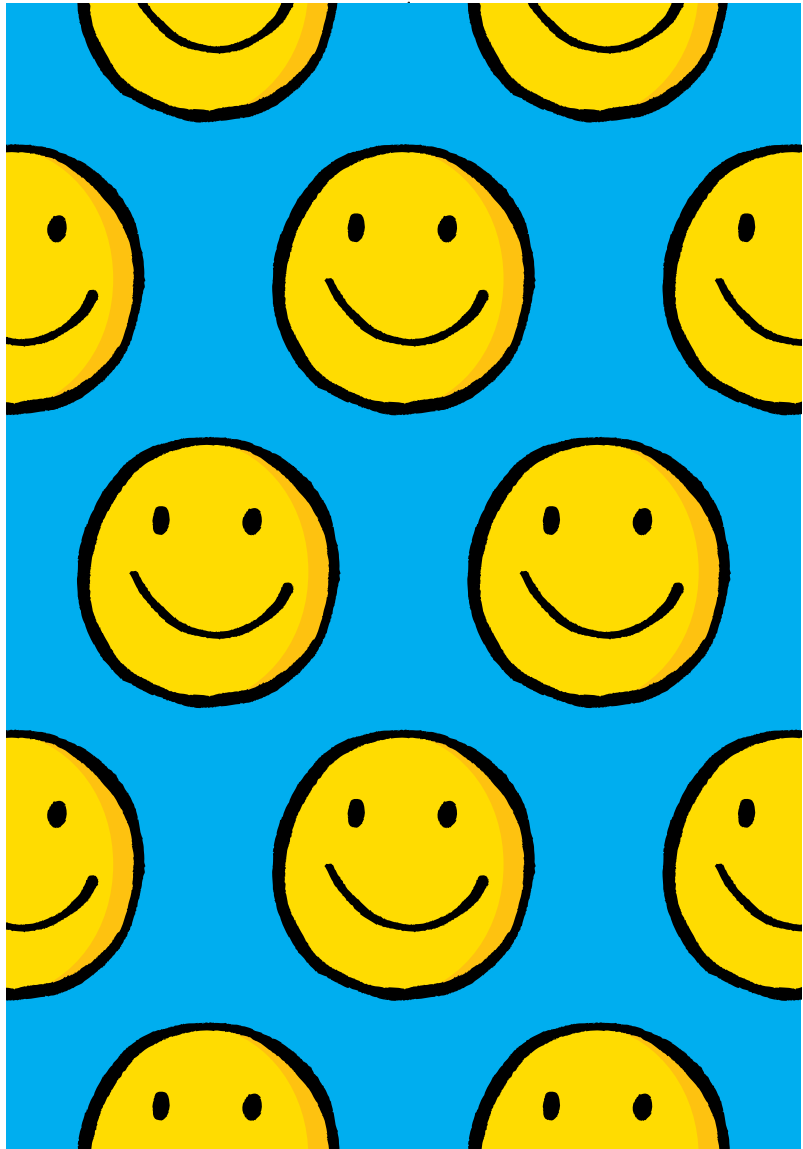
What litigator can say their job is easy or feel confident as they pronounce, “my gosh, I had no idea I would have this much free time.” Not many. Still fewer lawyers probably say they are so very successful and love their vocation so much that they want to do more of it for free.

Yet, that is exactly what a lawyer is asked to do as litigators with a Colorado license to practice law. Pro Bono service is not mandatory, but the Colorado Rules of Professional Conduct 6.1 provides that lawyers should aspire to a meet the goal of providing at least 50-hours of voluntary Pro Bono Publico service to the community per year. Qualifying recipients include persons of limited means or otherwise charitable, religious, civic, community, governmental or educational organizations designed primarily to address the needs of persons with limited means.

So, why do we do it?

1. because a close friend or relative needs help.
2. because the case involves a cause we support from a moral perspective.
3. because our employer asked us to.
4. because we want to be recognized in our community.
5. because we want to develop the social trust lawyers need to maintain the rule of law.
6. because doing so provides valuable experience to develop and maintain our legal skills.

Each one of these six rationales for providing pro bono service is on its own a sufficient reason to participate in pro bono activities. If by reading the list you are motivated to engage in pro bono services then the goal is satisfied and you can stop here if you like. If you’re not so sure yet or if social studies was a middle-school course of interest to you, keep reading.



To further simplify things, one might conclude that each of the above listed rationales falls into one or another category, either of which any lawyer should find sufficiently compelling to make pro bono practice through MVL programs one of their many priorities in their practice.

1. Selfless Altruism; or
2. Selfish Personal Gain.

Altruism

Some might argue that altruistic goals are a theoretical impossibility because any selfless act typically will result in some personal gratification for the actor. Others eschew this rather negative perspective and suggest that promoting altruism through socially conscious organizations like Metropolitan Volunteer Lawyers is

the only way to maintain a productive society.

Sociologists and their studies are often focused on how to build a good social structure, free from abuse and dishonesty among its members and supportive of the physical health, psychological wellness and ultimately the happiness of its constituents. As I have a bachelor's degree in sociology, I feel I can tell you that these things are true. I can also tell you that from my own research that the availability of highly compensated roles as a sociologist are few and far between. So much so that one might conclude that a career in sociology might actually be one of service to the community. On the other hand, law practice is so often defined by the general public as a manipulative way to earn money from the misfortune of others, even to the point of calling it a dishonest profession.

Do you want to help repair the misperception of lawyering as a dishonest profession? Are you the kind of person who loves to see joy in their world? Are you the kind of person who truly just wants their neighbors to feel happy? Then you might be just the sort of person who will engage in an MVL program for altruistic reasons. If so, please direct your internet browser to denbar.org/Metro-Volunteer-Lawyers and click the link to MVL Programs. There you will find a myriad of programs that could fit your availability, interests, and skills to provide free legal services while obtaining or maintaining your desired quality of life, both moral and spiritual.

Personal Gain

Depending on the stability of your personal financial situation, or perception of your personal success through influence, the concept of providing free services for personal gain might actually be the more compelling category of reasons to engage in Pro Bono legal service.

Can we all agree again that if our clients and potential clients do not trust the system of rules that we live under, then there can be no rule of law in our society

and hence our power as lawyers to assist in the development and enforcement of the laws is diminished. If we allow the public trust in our system of rules to diminish, then all that hard work in law school, our careers and potentially even our personal safety is doomed to loss. This is certainly a reason that falls under the category of personal gain. However, if performing Pro Bono work to support the Rule of Law still feels overly dramatic or "high-minded" to really own, then maybe you just resolve to do it for the research, experience, skills repetition and the *referrals*. Gosh, maybe you do it just for the no-fee continuing education credits that may be available to volunteers under certain programs.

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The Sociologist's Gray Area

The field of sociology is generally divided into two fields social theory and then statistical surveys. In my studies during college, I always felt that the categories created in social theory were forced upon us while each one of us should be recognized as a special and incomparable individual of our own. The social statistics classes produced data using calculus that seemed to better recognize that no one is the same but that through aggregating the behaviors of populations, we can best describe human action in shades of grey. No matter how difficult that statistical calculus was for me, I always felt shorted when we started talking about specific categories of behavior or motivation. Yet, here I am offering you some categories as examples to motivate participation in Pro Bono activity. As a professor once told me, categories can be incomplete or insufficiently specific to any individual,

but describing social interaction is "just simpler that way."

Suffice, I've thought about this a whole lot. I've concluded that I want people to be happy, that I derive certain pleasure when a Pro Bono client sends me a thank you note and a photo of their smiling family as thanks for helping. I must also admit that I also feel joy when I swoop-in like a hero, create and implement a strategy to end or at least curtail abusive behavior. Then again, I also love it when I ask a paying client where from whom they were referred only to find it was a non-paying client who appreciated my services enough to provide a positive review or a direct referral of me to a paying client. There are also those free CLE programs and the valuable social engagement that comes from Bar Association membership made only more deep and meaningful by working hand in hand with the association's beneficial organization Metropolitan Volunteer Lawyers. 

Prepared for Metropolitan Volunteer Lawyers — a program of the Denver Bar Association with co-sponsorship by the Adams/Broomfield Bar Association, Arapahoe Bar Association, Douglas/Elbert Bar Association and the First Judicial District Bar Association

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