



PRESIDENT'S PAGE

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Giving Back: Never Easy, Always Rewarding

"Ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country." These famous words from President John F. Kennedy's inauguration ring true not only as a form of patriotism, but also in all aspects of our lives. What President Kennedy was telling us was that we need to give back—whether to our country, to our local community, or to our profession.

The last week in October is ABA National Pro Bono Week and, therefore, a great time to remind ourselves of the importance of giving back in the form of providing legal services to those who cannot afford to pay for such services. Over and over we hear about the justice gap—that is, the gap between those who need legal services and those who actually receive legal services. The State Bar wants to address the justice gap through systemic overhauling of our profession, arguing that simply increasing the number of pro bono hours each lawyer takes on will not be sufficient. Leaving aside whether we as lawyers can meaningfully close the justice gap through increased efforts to serve un-served or underserved populations through pro bono work, we nonetheless must recognize that we absolutely can make a difference in real people's lives. October is a great time to remember that.

October also is the month that the OCBA honors its volunteers through a Volunteer Recognition Reception. This year, of course, the "Reception" is virtual. But our inability to gather together in person should not detract from the purpose of the event, which is to recognize the many OCBA members who give their time in service of both their community and their profession. These include Section leaders who put on countless education programs, even after being forced to switch to online platforms; Committee members who spend time organizing food and clothing drives, analyzing proposed changes to our laws and ethics rules, and managing the finances of the OCBA; and Task Force members who search for ways to increase racial justice, to inform and educate our members about COVID-related events and changes, and to let the State Bar know that we are watching them carefully. And, of course, these include all of our members who have given their time and energy so that the rest of us can benefit from their efforts.

Volunteering—or giving back—is never easy, but always rewarding. We as lawyers often lack for anything resembling free time. While I hear from others (mostly non-lawyers) that, during COVID quarantines, they learned how to bake or play a musical instrument, I have struggled just to keep up with my caseload and Bar-related commitments. I certainly have not picked up any new hobbies. But giving back is never time I regret spending.


For newer lawyers, the pressure is always especially intense. Law firms often expect monumental efforts in terms of time billed, leaving

little time to do much else. But one way or another, it would behoove all lawyers, including newer lawyers, to squeeze out at least some time to help others. You will not regret it.

Of course, giving back comes in many shapes and sizes. It could be taking on a pro bono matter through one of Orange County's excellent legal services organizations or joining an OCBA Section or Committee. But it could be something completely different. Maybe you love animals. Giving back for you could mean donating your time helping at an animal shelter. Or maybe joining the board of an animal rescue organization. Perhaps you want to help children. There are countless organizations in Orange County that assist children whose families either don't have the resources to provide what they need, or who simply are neglected by the system. Give time to one of these organizations. The opportunities are truly limitless.

And to those law firms and law firm partners who would discourage their newer lawyers from volunteering at least some of their time, I would ask that they consider the upside not only for the development of their newer lawyers, but also the benefits to the law firm itself. First, developing into a quality lawyer requires more than just sitting at one's desk drafting motions or revising asset purchase agreements. It also requires becoming a good and well-rounded person. Among other things, our life experiences—if our employers allow us to have any—make us more empathetic, trustworthy, and valuable advisors to our clients. And, of course, a law firm with better lawyers and better people will be more successful in all ways that success should be measured.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, giving back should not be a chore. Find something you enjoy doing, with people you enjoy doing it with. Joining an organization will benefit neither you nor the organization if your heart isn't in it. But when you are moved by a cause, or just enjoy attending an organization's events, you will give more and get more. And that is the key.

So, even though we are still under quasi-lockdown during this time of volunteer recognition, let us reflect on and reconfirm our commitment to giving back—to clients, to our community, to our profession, to someone. When you do for others, you may be surprised at how much those experiences end up doing for you. 

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