

In Their Words: Associates' Lessons From Pro Bono Work

By **Aebra Coe**

Law360 (October 26, 2022, 2:51 PM EDT) -- Taking on a pro bono matter can be a transformative experience for a new attorney, helping them develop vital legal skills and see the world from the perspective of someone in need whose future hangs in the balance of the legal system.

While the societal benefits of pro bono work may be obvious — improved access to justice — there is also a lot that lawyers themselves stand to gain from putting in their pro bono hours.

Pro bono work can be a learning experience on a number of different levels, including gaining insight into the life of a person facing a life-altering legal challenge, taking early responsibility over a case, learning how to work efficiently with co-counsel and opposing counsel, and being reminded of the enormous responsibility lawyers have to society as advocates within the justice system.

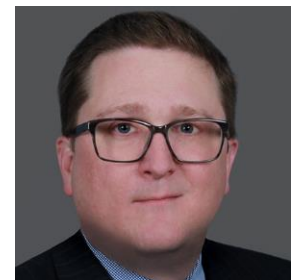
Here, during the American Bar Association's 2022 National Celebration of Pro Bono, associates at 12 law firms share their stories and the lessons they've learned from the recent pro bono work they've taken on.

These quotes have been edited for length and clarity.

Geoffrey M. Pipoly

Mayer Brown

"In 2020 and 2021, I authored two pro bono amicus briefs in federal appellate courts on the subject of transgender rights. The briefs were on behalf of several dozen legal ethics scholars from across the country, and argued that common courtesy — which underpins the codes of legal and judicial ethics — dictates that courts should refer to transgender persons as they wish to be referred.



My biggest takeaway from that work — and indeed from all my pro bono work — is the reminder that lawyers can be a force for positive change in the world. This might seem like an obvious point — after all, nearly every legal drama in television and on film seems bent on driving home the lawyer-as-changemaker narrative. But all too often I find myself forgetting that what we do — what we are empowered by virtue of our licenses to do — is directly affect other human beings' lives. I think

too many of us forget that, especially those of us in the private sector, but it's true. Trite as it may sound, pro bono work is the thing that taps me on the shoulder from time to time in order to remind me that one of the reasons I went to law school in the first place is to leave the world just a little bit better than I found it."

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