

Five Reasons to do Pro Bono Appeals

By Daniel F. Polsenberg, Esq.

1. It's the best you can do as a lawyer.

Doing pro bono is more than the right thing to do. It is the best thing you can do as a lawyer. With your license, you have the keys to the courthouse. You have the ability to unlock access to justice for an otherwise stranded client.

And that is especially so for appeals. To lay people, the web of the law seems like a mystery inside an enigma. Because of their awkward unfamiliarity, they are of little help to the courts, or themselves. That is where you come in.

While the Bar and the courts strive to improve the system as a whole, you can use your abilities to make it work in one particular case. That is the lawyer's job.

2. There is nothing [else] like an appeal.

Focusing on the law in an appeal is a great way to hone your legal skills. That's what you did in law school, but years of depositions may have intervened. Doing an appeal (or doing one in a different area of law) will use different mental muscles.

3. It's great professional experience.

Malcolm Gladwell suggests it takes 10,000 hours of practice to develop mastery. But it's hard to get experience. That is true for appeals, as well as trials. Picking up a few pro bono cases is a great way to get that experience.

4. People will help you help pro bono clients.

Both the Ninth Circuit and the Nevada Supreme Court have pro bono programs that guarantee oral argument. In addition, veteran lawyers in the State Bar's appellate litigation section will help you prepare with a moot court.

5. It's a rewarding personal experience.

Oh, that reminds me of a story. The famous appellate lawyer Abraham Lincoln gave his coat to a homeless woman, and a friend commented on his generosity. "No, I was thinking of myself," Honest Abe disclaimed. "I would have felt awful if I had not done that."

Okay, we can doubt the authenticity of that parable, but don't miss the point. "When I do good, I feel good." Lincoln did say that.

And so can you.

To get started today, contact the Pro Bono Project at Legal Aid Center of Southern Nevada at probono@lacsno.org (or visit www.lacsno.org.)



Dan Polsenberg has argued over 250 appeals and is a past president of the Clark County Bar and the State Bar of Nevada.

Community Champions Gala

Saturday, February 27, 2016
Red Rock Casino Resort Spa

A special event to honor:

Senior U.S. District Judge Lloyd D. George
Champion of A Lifetime Award

John H. Mowbray, Esq.
Champion of Justice through Service Award

William H. Scott Jr.
Champion Advocate of Change Award

Contributions should be made payable to "Clark County Law Foundation", and mailed to Clark County Law Foundation, 725 S. 8th St., Las Vegas, NV 89101.



The Clark County Law Foundation (CCLF) is dedicated to providing community service and law-related education programs throughout Southern Nevada. Contact CCLF at (702) 333-8277 or visit www.clarkcountylawfoundation.org.